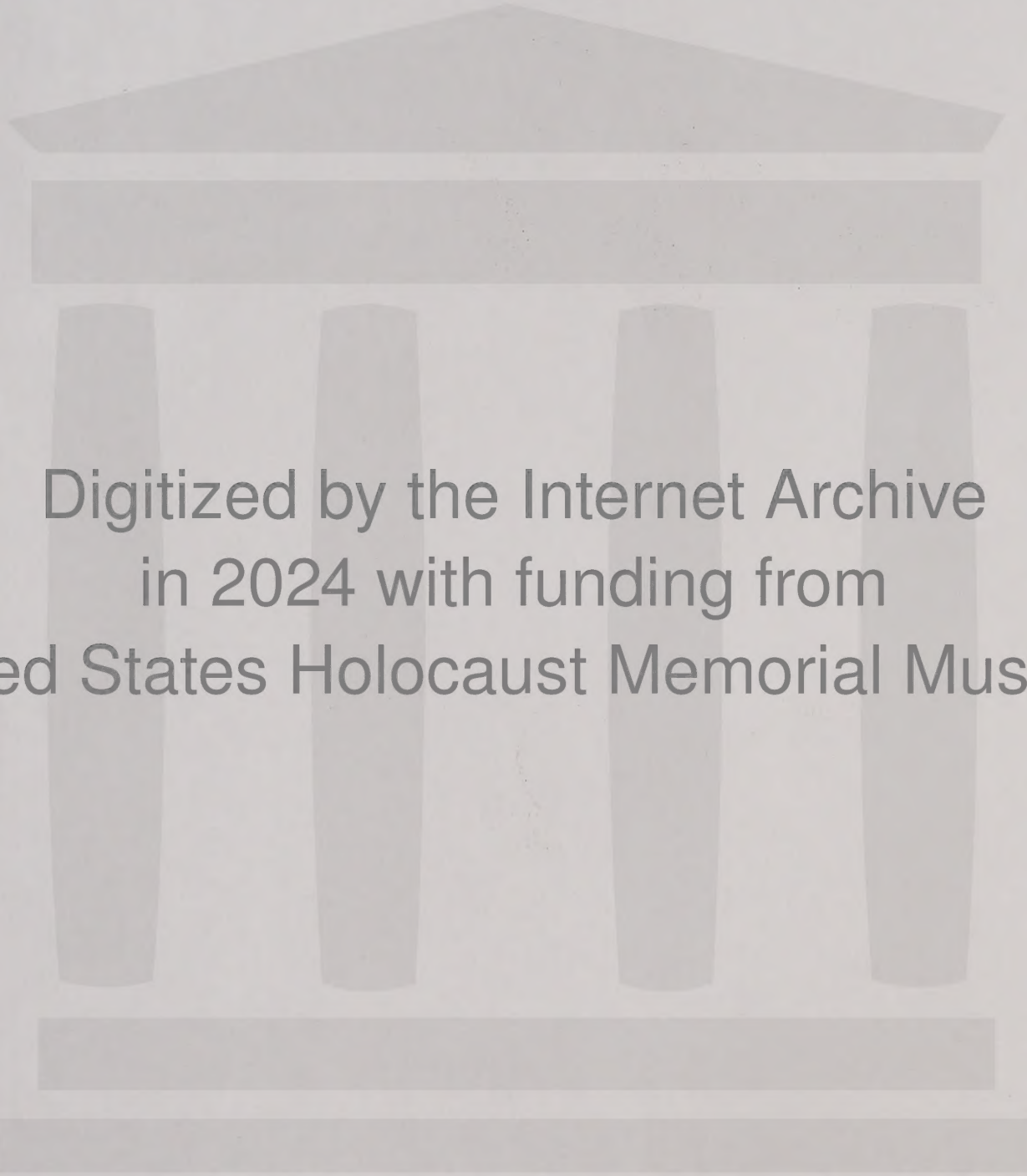




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Survivor from Wesola Street

By Dr. Adam Broner

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possible grammatical and spelling errors. Needless to say, all the remaining errors of fact or omission are the author's responsibility.

Introduction

History sometimes, unwillingly, creates paradoxes. In August 1939, the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany signed the so-called Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of Non-aggression, which included a secret provision stipulating the partition of Poland. A short time after that, WWII started. It is my contention that the two countries verbally agreed that both sides would allow, for several months, the movement of people from either side of the newly established border. In fact, after the cessation of hostilities in Poland, for a while people were moving relatively freely between those newly occupied territories.

This created a unique opportunity for several hundred thousand Jews living in the German-occupied territories to escape to the Soviet side. A large percentage of these refugees survived the war. If that pact had not been concluded and the Germans had occupied all of Poland, then very few would have survived.

A. The entire group of Polish Jews that survived the war in the Soviet Union can be divided into two distinct subgroups: Those that lived in the eastern part of Poland, which was occupied by the Red Army on September 17, 1939, and refugees from the 1939 German-occupied territories of Poland. Of the more than one million Jews that lived in eastern Poland, most did not have the opportunity to evacuate before the invasion of the Germans on June 22, 1941. A small number probably escaped during the first days of the Soviet-German war and presumably survived.

A number of refugees from the German-occupied territories of the country voluntarily signed up to work in different regions of the Soviet Union, mostly in the Urals and Siberia. An overwhelming number of them survived the war and returned to Poland after its liberation, whether as civilians or as part of the so-called Kosciuszko Army. Another percentage, who preferred to remain in the overcrowded Soviet-occupied territories, were deported—most deep into Siberia—by Soviet authorities in the summer of 1940. Although these refugees suffered greatly, many survived.

I was fourteen when the war started in 1939. My story could have ended at that age, as it did for my younger sister Shajndl, my brother Yitzhak, and another million Jewish children murdered by the Nazis.

I decided to escape from the Germans in November 1939. In retrospect, I can say, unequivocally, that this decision was the most important and consequential in my life. It can now be viewed within the context of the life-and-death struggle between Hitler and his murderous hordes on the one side and the Jewish people on the other. The Nazis' goal was the extermination of all Jews. In this heinous endeavor, they almost succeeded. In a few cases, the Jews won. I am among those lucky ones. However, all of my immediate family and relatives, who remained under German occupation, perished.

Each story of a survivor who had a chance to fight back and win is testimony to the truth that, whenever there was a possibility to actively resist with arms, Jews eagerly engaged the Nazi enemy. I would venture to say that, even those that fell in that battle, are winners. And there are many thousands of them.

The uprisings in the Warsaw and Bialystok ghettos, especially in the cruelest death camps of Treblinka, Sobibor, and Chelmetz, as well as the many smaller uprisings

and acts of sabotage, should be considered the highest human heroism. Many Jews, including myself, were luckier and found opportunities to fight against the Nazis in allied armies. Much of this memoir leads the reader along the paths that I had to travel and the obstacles I had to overcome to finally get a rifle in my hand.

The title of my book refers to Wesola Street (read Vesola Street) in the town of Lodz, Poland, where I was born and grew up. At the end of Wesola Street was an old Jewish cemetery. During the German occupation, it was included in the Ghetto, and, after the defeat of the Nazis, the street was wiped off the city map. Polish neighbors disassembled all the houses, looking for treasures in the walls and floors. The government later decided to build a thoroughfare leading through the Jewish cemetery. I decided to devote some space to the faith of Wesola Street as a testimonial to its Jewish people, including my parents and siblings.

My recollections of Lodz, its many neighborhoods and streets, are mainly associated with the years of my childhood. Despite the rampant poverty visible in many of its streets, including Wesola, it was a vibrant community, rich in Jewish culture and tradition. I recall those places with a great deal of nostalgia.

In pre-war Poland, I was a poor boy, whose dreams could not reach beyond what was typical in my social strata of becoming a tailor, shoemaker, or, at best, a *melamed* (school teacher). When, at the age of 13 or 14, I was looking for a job in the help-wanted sections of Jewish newspapers, I thought in awe about the profession of accountant as a very high achievement that I could not even dream about. I was fortunate to reach much higher than that in my adult life.

I am thankful to the U.S. government for allowing my family to immigrate to this country and reaching hitherto unachievable goals. With the help of many wonderful people, I was admitted to Princeton University's Graduate School of Economics, from which I received my doctoral degree. I was, for many years, Director of the New Jersey Office of Economic Policy. In that capacity, I served as advisor to Governors Brendan T. Byrne and Thomas H. Kean during their terms in office.

Although such achievements are not unimportant, they are not the reason why I undertook to write this memoir. It is not merely about myself that I want to engage readers of this story. For a long time, I contemplated different reasons why I should or should not write this memoir. I want to state briefly the main reasons why I decided to do it now.

Maybe it is a strange psychological phenomenon, but I wanted to find out exactly what happened to my parents, siblings, and relatives. Is it too much to ask where and when my loved ones could have been humiliated, starved, tortured, shot, or burned alive? I kept postponing writing because I still thought that, one day, I might learn more about their fate. I was searching because I could not free myself from these thoughts. The Nazis were killing freely whenever they wanted without recording their deeds. Moreover, they were trying to hide their crimes by removing, wherever possible, any traces of them. Now, at the twilight days of my life, I cannot postpone writing about it any longer.

In some, not-so-friendly circles, the notion was advanced that it is time to forget about the Nazi atrocities and maybe even time to forgive them. I am not able to do either! The more years that go by, the more painful it is for me to think about what happened to my people.

I was also thinking about the notion that Jews did not resist the Nazis, even in situations where they could have. Many facts uncovered and described in the holocaust literature contradict that undeserved view. I wanted to add my war experience, along with those of the many thousands of Jewish armed resisters, to disprove that notion.

Together with the Jews of Eastern Europe, a very advanced cultural and religious life was lost. I think I should put on paper what I know and personally experienced, during my young age, of that rich Jewish religious and cultural life.

The final argument convincing me to write this story was the prodding of many friends—and my own conviction—that I owe it to my parents, siblings, and relatives, who were brutally murdered by the Nazi beast. Very early in my life, when I was still a teenager, I started dreaming about returning to Lodz on a tank to rescue my loved ones. On January 18, 1945, during the offensive of the Red Army and the Polish divisions, my army unit reached Sochaczew, located about 35 miles west of Warsaw. From there, if my unit had been directed southwest, I would have been only about one day's march from my city of Lodz. I was *that* close to my goal! Instead, the order was to turn north toward the Wloclawek-Bydgoszcz area. I was devastated, desperate, and willing to join some other units advancing toward Lodz. Friends discouraged me from leaving without permission; it could have been considered desertion. Hence, military discipline prevailed. Ultimately, I failed to rescue my people.

Now, I have the opportunity not to fail in honoring their memory. It is the only remaining thing to do on their behalf. The reader will not learn about what actually happened to them—only that they all perished during the war, from the hands of the Nazis. I am dedicating this memoir to my father, Israel; my mother, Ajdel Ita, my sister

Chana, her husband Leib Moszkowicz, and their two little children; sisters Esther, Dvojra, and Shajndl; my youngest brother, Yitzhak; and the many relatives from Lodz and the shtetls Kamiensk and Gorzkowice. Let their memory be preserved forever in the story of their son and brother!

Part one: From Childhood to Warrior

Fun amidst Poverty

I was born into a poor family. My childhood was, to a large degree, determined by this circumstance. My parents worked from early morning till late in the evening. Those were the good times. Several months during the year they did not have any work. Then they were busy looking for any opportunity to earn some money. Since I was ten years old, I had to work myself to contribute to the family's income.

Poverty is one of the main factors that limits a child's potential to lead a playful and happy life. In the case of Jewish children in pre-war Poland, there was also a religious circumstance that influenced children's ability to play and have fun. By and large, children of religious Jewish families had little opportunity to indulge in excessive playing. I, for example, was sent to a *cheder* (school) before I was five years old.

In 1929, we lived in a *shtetl* (village) called Kamiensk, which was associated with a long history of many generations of Broners. While searching for my roots, I uncovered some of that history, dating back to the end of the 18th century. I knew that my mother's parents lived there and could surmise that this place was where more generations of her ancestors resided. I was pleasantly surprised to find out that my father's roots also led to Kamiensk. His parents were born there and moved to the city of Lodz in the mid-1800s. Only recently did I discover that my

maternal grandma Blima was also a Broner. There must have been many graveyards of Broners in Kamiensk, if they were preserved.

Kamiensk was a typical Polish settlement. It had a relatively large plaza—a square surrounded by single-story houses. There was no industry in Kamiensk, except for the few artisans whose entire operation was confined to a single room in the house. It was a quiet place. At the center of a large square in the middle of the village stood the monument of Tadeusz Kosciuszko, Poland's national hero, also renowned in the United States for his participation in the independence revolution. Across the square stood an impressive roman-catholic church, a source of anxiety and fear for little boys like me. In close proximity to the church was the house where my grandparents used to live.

Surrounding the Kosciuszko monument was a green fence about one meter tall around which children played. The popular game at that time was riding metal rings from pickle and herring barrels. Initially, the little kids would ride small-diameter rings. With acquired skill and age, the little rings were exchanged for larger ones. The dream of many of us was to ride the biggest ring, the one that was even larger than us.

On Wednesdays, the plaza also served as a marketplace. Farmers from the nearby villages brought their produce for sale and artisans exhibited in stalls their manufactured goods. Somewhere among those exhibitors was my mother, selling hats manufactured by my father. During those years—between 1929 and 1932—father was away working in Lodz. He sent the hats to mother from that large textile center, which was about 100 kilometers from Kamiensk.

I knew very little about my grandmother. Her name was Blima, which, in Yiddish, means flower. Most of my recollections of her center on the early morning coughing. I also knew that she kept in the drawer a small bottle (one-eighth of a liter) of spirits that she used to prepare

drinks for herself and my grandfather.

I know more about my grandfather. His name was Berish Ginat. He was a glazier. Every day, early in the morning (except Saturdays and Sundays), he would pick up a few blocks of glass, instruments, and putty clay, place all this in a special carrier, put it on his shoulders, and march away for a whole day. He would visit nearby villages, replace broken windows, and bring back various products, including milk, which had been milked directly into his container. He was a very religious person, strictly observing *kashrut*, the rules of Jewish dietary law. By providing his own container, he could be sure that the milk would remain strictly kosher. I also recall that he used to get up very early in the morning, put the *tefilim* (a tiny black box containing the sacred Ten Commandments written on a scroll) on his head, and start the morning prayers. He would walk back and forth in the narrow, rather long room, while, at the same time, shaking the bottle with sour cream to make fresh, kosher butter. He did not have the luxury of praying without also using the time for something else. He was a very practical man.

By the end of 1932, our family left Kamiensk to join father in Lodz. We took the inter-city bus that passed through Kamiensk from Czestochowa, destined for Lodz. When the bus arrived, there were no seats available. My grandfather decided to run home, which was about 200 meters from the bus station, bring a board, which we would put between the two aisles of seats in the bus. Several seconds before he arrived with the board, the bus took off. My grandfather was very disappointed and angry, threw the board away, and started hollering. I can still see him now, how he let his anger explode in the middle of the plaza.

A lot of fun and good memories can be recalled from his commercial activity. Grandfather would lease orchards early in the spring for a given sum and own the fruits when they ripened. It was always a risky business because of unpredictable weather conditions and, therefore, the size

of the harvest. For us kids, it was a lot of fun since grandpa assigned us the role of the orchard's guardians against other kids coming in to steal the apples or pears. We were roaming in those beautiful orchards, cooking meals on a little stove in the middle of it, eating as much fruit as we wanted, and feeling important in the family's enterprise.

I was sent to school to learn the Torah when I was younger than five years old. The little school was near my grandparents' house on the second floor of a dilapidated building. We learned the reading of the prayers and the Torah in Hebrew. The *melamed* (teacher) was poor, as were the parents of his pupils, who paid him little for his services, if at all.

According to Jewish tradition, during the first week of a newborn's life, school pupils visit the mother and baby, sing a blessing and are rewarded with cookies and candies. One day, in the middle of 1930 (when I was five years old), my mother gave birth to my youngest brother, her seventh and last child. Every afternoon after school, the whole class would run across the plaza to one of the streets where our family lived, knock at the door, and, even before the door was opened, start singing the blessing. All of us, including myself, were well rewarded. Since those days, I loved my baby brother very much.

On his eighth day of life, he was circumcised and named Yitzhak; we then had a *bris* (big party) in our home, attended by many people. We had a barrel of beer from which various guests took turns pumping the cold beer into glasses. There was a lot of food, and at the end of the celebration, everybody waited for the waffle cake, made in the shape of a bowl. People broke away pieces of the waffle, making a lot of noise and having a good time. I don't know whether the waffle had some special meaning, but, at some point during the party, it became the center of attention. This is probably why, at the age of five, it became so fixed in my memory.

Except for a vivid picture of mother freezing in the cold of the winter market days, trying

to sell hats, I don't remember much of what happened between 1930 and 1932. Yes, father would come home for important religious holidays, mother would complain about the miserable life, but nothing else important is left in my memory.

Wednesday fairs were a source of excitement, provided by the son of the town's *szoichet* (Jewish butcher). He was a kleptomaniac, going out regularly to steal some fruits or vegetables. Usually, farmers would catch him and beat him up to make him remember it for his entire life. He had a way of screaming so loudly and dramatically that listeners from afar would be convinced that this time he was hit very hard and maybe he would not survive it. Within a couple of hours, the same screaming would fill the little town again. He was back at his favorite activity—shoplifting.

The Catholic Church taught its followers that the Jews killed Jesus Christ, avoiding telling them that Jesus himself was a Jewish Rabbi. That teaching generated a lot of hostility toward Jews. On our side, especially among young children, it was a source of great fear. I was always afraid that, if they would catch me one day, they would punish me with the same blows they inflicted on the butcher's son, the shoplifter. Traces of that fear remained with me the whole time I lived in Poland. I was afraid to be in close proximity of a Catholic Church.

Only once, probably 1935 or 1936, did I return to Kamiensk before the war. I went with my younger sister Shajndl on a vacation to visit our grandparents. It was terribly boring. Just a few years of living in a large city had made us so enthusiastic about its dynamic environment that the quiet, nearly empty Kamiensk felt like being thrown into a deep, isolated pit. There was one store in the plaza where some movement took place; that was a shop where a motor pumped water into a container, mixing it with gas and juices to produce lemonade. How many times could one amuse oneself walking back and forth in front of this place without being able to afford to go

in and buy a glass of lemonade? The other attraction was the inter-city bus that came by once a day. We left the place disappointed, determined never to return to it.

When, in 1932, our family returned to Lodz, my birthplace, I attended an integrated religious-secular school that occupied most of the day, leaving little time to play. That was typical for Jewish boys of religious families, where learning, not playing, was the highest priority. And yet we were able to find some limited time to play and have fun as well.

In Lodz, we moved into a room on Wesola Street. Located in a very poor neighborhood, this short street resembled none of the exciting streets of the large metropolitan cities of Europe. Lodz was not among them either. It was a large textile city, but the area where Wesola was located was poor, without any factory or even a decent grocery store. It was a dead end street, an appropriate adjective because, at the end, was a Jewish cemetery. Everybody who knew the street wondered who came up with the name Wesola, which, translated from the Polish, means “merry.” Whoever named the street was probably poking fun. Actually, many years earlier, the street was called Smutna (meaning “sad”).

By the time our family lived there, the cemetery was already closed. However, during the summer months, nearby residents would use the cemetery as a recreational park. Children used to roam around the graves, enjoying the fresh air and the shade of the luscious greenery of the trees and shrubs.

The buildings inside the old cemetery were transformed into a psychiatric hospital. For that reason, the gate to the cemetery was usually closed to prevent dangerous patients from leaving the hospital premises. Whenever weather permitted, a group of patients would turn the water pump in the cemetery yard. Wearing gray hospital clothing, for several hours each day, they would silently perform their “work.” Since the well was locked, they couldn’t release any water.

These were the non-violent patients. When the cemetery was used as a park on hot summer days, those patients did not work in the yard and the gate would be opened to the public.

As a reminder of the cemetery's past, an ornate funeral cortege would occasionally leave the main gate and drive through Wesola Street. Two beautifully adorned, black horses usually drew it, led by a man wearing a black coat and a top hat. Whenever four horses drew the cortege, we wondered what famous or rich Jew was going to be buried that day in the new Jewish cemetery far away in the Marysin section of the city.

We lived in house #8. It was one of several two-story buildings. Four families lived on the first floor, only one was Jewish, while four Jewish families lived in single rooms on the second floor.

At the rear of our building was a yard, about 20 by 15 meters, in which the Polish owners planted flowers in the summer. Near that garden was an outhouse, the lower part of, which was painted black, and the upper part white. In the middle of the yard was a water pump; on the left side there was a stall for horses and a little shack at the corner. The Jewish owner of the horses had two platforms, which, in the evenings, were also parked in the yard.

The horses were a big attraction in our yard. There was also a dog called Aza, which we greatly feared. Once in a while, the dog managed to run out through the open door of its Polish owner; once outside, it became wild and dangerous. The horses, on the other hand, were friendly, usually tired and hungry when returning from a day's work.

Children liked to watch the wagoner harness his horses each morning and unharness them each evening. He had two platforms: a flat one and another with two convex doors covering the entire cart, which he used to transport meat. The latter was about two meters high, and we liked to climb on top of it and jump down. However, the flat platform was more useful to us. During

hot summer nights, when sleeping inside was uncomfortable, children would go out to sleep on that platform. How sweet it was to stretch out one's legs there and fall asleep, enveloped in the aroma of the flowers from the nearby garden! Early in the morning, at about five or six o'clock, one would wake up fresh and content after a few hours of sleep. Unforgettable is the smell of those little flowers that opened in the evening, their aroma lingering in the air well into the night.

We had to carry water from the yard. Usually it was not a problem, except during the wintertime. At freezing temperatures, spilled water created a huge ice-covered area, making it difficult, and even dangerous, to get the water. Since there was no plumbing in the rooms, we had to go to the outhouse in the yard. Before entering this place, one usually had to knock at the door a few times to chase away the rats.

Sometime in 1937, a very strange Jewish family, moved into the shack at the far-left corner of the yard. Apparently, the father was a professional burglar just released from jail after serving a six-month term. Children usually fear burglars, as even grown-ups do, but to us he looked like a very nice person. Apparently, he decided to quit his profession, but we didn't see him doing any other work. His wife worked somewhere. Initially, they didn't have enough furniture, and the couple was sleeping on the floor. For some strange reason, I liked to visit them often. Maybe because of their daughter, Edzia. She was a very pretty girl about 18 years old. Edzia was always well dressed and often in the company of several young men. They adored her and I liked her, too. However, I never followed her, as the others did, since I was much younger and no match for her. Despite my disadvantage, I was more often privileged to visit her in their room. We would turn on their radio, a rarity in our house, and listen to beautiful dance music from Toulouse, France in a dimly lit room, with Edzia lying on the couch. But we didn't dance; I didn't yet know how.

Edzia's older sister was even prettier. She worked at the Dishkin deli store on the most beautiful Piotrkowska Street. Whenever I had a chance, I liked to go there and watch through the window to see how fast and elegantly she was cutting salami with a large knife. With each order of salami, she added a little tube filled with mustard. This was the custom at the Dishkin store.

Very rarely did children have toys in our neighborhood, especially boys. Most of our playing together was outside, in the yard or in the street.

Winter provided little opportunity to play together. Nevertheless, we liked the first snows, the conditions allowing us to create snowmen and the icy paths inviting skating competitions. We didn't have skates. All we needed was a pair of leather shoes. Then we could see who could skate the longest distant on the icy path. This competition took place on the street, since there wasn't enough room in the yard.

In the summertime, we used to play soccer, but we didn't have a real soccer ball. We wrapped together a lot of rags (of which we had plenty from the tailor on our floor) and had fun kicking that ball as vigorously as possible. No youngster on our street owned a bike. Even if one had owned one, he wouldn't have been able to ride it because everybody would have run after him, begging to let him try it out. That's what we did whenever one of us got some money and rented a bike for a half an hour at the velodrom on 11 Listopada Street.

During the summer, city regulations required sprinkling water on the streets several times a day. Most streets strictly enforced this regulation, but Wesola Street rarely followed the rule. Hence it was dirty, dry, and dusty. Once in a while, Mother Nature compensated us for that. One summer day, heavy rain poured for several hours, and the street was flooded. The water reached about a meter high, and children decided to take advantage of that unusual event, taking a bath in Wesola Street. I did that, too. Nobody knew how to swim since there was no river in Lodz, so we

walked in that muddy water for quite a while. Naturally, the water contained many impurities. As a result, I got many black spots on my body, and had to cure myself. Fortunately, they soon disappeared. Despite all this trouble, I had fun.

I don't know whether it was a reflection of the times, but many Jewish boys decided to organize an army unit and play "war." We scrambled together some money and, over time, assembled a significant number of toy guns, swords, and belts and started training and attacking the enemies. The offensive unit was attacking the Germans. I don't think anybody liked to play the role of the Germans, but somebody had to do it. I remember that my friend Lewkowicz from the building #4 was one of the officers. Zelig, my best friend, was also in that unit. Unfortunately, I can't recall more names from our "army."

German Occupation

I was eight years old when Hitler assumed power in post-Weimar Germany. Though still a child, I vividly remember the event. Father and I were in the prayer house in Lodz. During the breaks between prayers, the talk about the events in Germany was agitated. There was no illusion about Hitler's views of the Jews. What sticks in my mind, however, was father's comment that now Hitler will remind all the assimilated Jews in Germany who they really are. I could surmise from those conversations that something pernicious happened, but I didn't understand the full ramifications of that event. As it would later become clear, neither had the majority of the Jewish people.

Sometime in 1938, father was preparing a prototype military hat for the Grabski Company, a large supplier to the Polish military. It was a practical test of his ability to produce military hats according to the precise description and approved design. He passed the test and was awarded a contract for a large number of hats. Our one-room living space became a hat factory that employed, in addition to my father, his son-in-law Leib, my older brother Samuel, and frequently myself and several other people. The contract spelled out precisely at what day and hour a given number of hats were to be ready for delivery. The so-called *rogatywkas* (a four-cornered cap worn only in non-combat situations) had to be packed in special wooden boxes supplied by the Grabski Company. No room for any delay, even a few minutes, was allowed.

In the context of Poland's situation at that time, it was strange that a Jewish hatmaker was

being awarded a huge contract for making military hats by a company that was unfriendly toward Jews. Was this a sign of some urgent war preparations and an increased military budget? Those hats were good for military parades, not for encountering German tanks. But wasn't the whole Polish military preparing for war the wrong way? We saw it later in how cavalry units were attempting to stop the German tanks.

Tensions generated by Hitler's speeches, the *anschluss* of Austria, and demands against Czechoslovakia and Poland were pointing toward war, sooner or later. I observed many small groups (mainly Jews) often gathered on *Plac Wolnosci* (Freedom Plaza), the center of the city of Lodz, heatedly discussing the dark clouds accumulating on the international horizon. In the summer of 1939, those discussions intensified, becoming increasingly frantic in late August.

Meanwhile, Poland's new Marshal Smigly-Rydz (who replaced Marshal Pilsudski after his death in 1935) sounded very bellicose, ready to defend the Fatherland against the German threat. In 1939, he launched a public-relations campaign. Under the banner "Strong, United, and Ready," he was depicted on large street posters against a sky of Polish aircraft. Another government poster showed a big eye watching, along with a warning that the enemy is listening—meaning that the population should be alert to German spies being everywhere—also heated up the atmosphere of an imminent outbreak of hostilities. Above all, we had frequent drills of the civil defense in case of the enemy's bombardment. The military broadcasted special codes that nobody could decipher, while sirens announced approaching bombers, meaning that everyone outside was supposed to run to special shelters. In the evenings, everyone had to cover the lights in their windows and those on moving vehicles with dark blue paper. All of this was supposed to prepare the population for the worst. It worked up to a point, but then became routine. When enemy bombers actually approached the city skies, we took the announcement for another drill and virtually ignored it

until the bombs were actually falling.

World War II started on Friday, September 1, 1939 with German provocations along the Polish-German border. German units quickly overpowered the weak border defenses. President Ignacy Moscicki made the announcement to the nation, which I happened to hear at a big patriotic rally on Plac Wolnosci that tragic Friday morning.

I spent the next couple of days at my Uncle David's place on Cegielniana 53, where I was helping to run the grocery store. We experienced several, relatively light bombardments that, apparently, were aimed at the nearby railroad station (Lodz Fabryczna). For some strange reason, most of the building's tenants would go outside during the bombardments. During one such bombardment, a rumor was spread that the Germans were using gases. Everybody covered his mouth with a wet handkerchief or napkin. For a few minutes, there was real panic. Luckily, the reality was not so bad. After a while, people realized that no gas was being used.

Bombardment of the city of Lodz was minor because approximately one third of its people were of German origin. The real panic came on Wednesday night. Like the previous couple of nights, we were sleeping in our clothes in case we needed to run to shelters. At about 2 o'clock in the morning, frantic commotion and screaming woke me up. At first, I couldn't understand why everyone was preparing to leave—why the tears and panic. Soon I learned that, according to radio announcements, the Germans were rapidly approaching the city and the government was calling on all men capable of bearing arms to immediately leave the city and head toward Warsaw. When I went outside to the front of the building, I saw hundreds of people (not only men) leaving the town. As a military veteran, Uncle David decided to go as well, since he was subject to mobilization at any moment.

Everyone was surprised at the speed with which the German troops were advancing. The

common wisdom, derived from experience in World War I, was that, at worst, it would take them two-to-three months to reach the city of Lodz, a distance of more than 300 kilometers from the border. Instead, they were approaching the city in matter of three-to-four days.

On that Wednesday night, I immediately left Uncle David's home and went to my parents on Wesola 8, a distance of about five kilometers. In the wee hours of the morning, I arrived home to discover that our room was locked. The landlord gave me the news that everybody had left. I felt abandoned and couldn't understand why my parents had made such an adventurous decision. It was a sign of the panic that had engulfed the Jewish population.

I asked the landlord to let me use a ladder to enter our second-floor room through a window. I wanted to pick up some cloths, especially my favorite sweater, which, I reasoned correctly, I may need during the upcoming autumn chill.

I then went to my oldest sister, Chana, who was living on Stary Rynek 15 (Old Market). When I arrived there, her husband had already left but she had remained home with her two small children. For the next few days, which were most dramatic days, I stayed with them.

Thursday, the sixth day of the war, started with intensive artillery shelling over the city's skies. This was the first time I experienced a full night of artillery bombing. We were in the shelter in the basement of the building, and the echo of shelling was enhanced within its walls. Most of the buildings on Old Market had basements that served as warehouses for stores on the first floor. The buildings were old and rather shaky.

Late Thursday and Friday morning, decimated units of the Polish Army retreated. The soldiers tired, dirty, and dispirited, many of them wounded though capable of walking. The air was still filled with the smell of exploding artillery shells. The city government was not functioning; its staff probably left the city on Wednesday, along with many others. We heard that

an interim committee had been set up to replace the city government. The first thing it did was to send out people to remove all the patriotic posters, which might offend the Germans. Many people were scrubbing the walls clean.

By the end of Friday, few retreating Polish soldiers could be found. At twilight, the first Germans entered the city. I always thought that this would be the most frightening moment of my life, and rightly so. I could not imagine that I would be able to face that moment. Despite that fear, I wanted to witness everything that was happening. Somehow I overcame my fear and went out in front of the house. The first German soldiers arrived after a couple of hours of ominous silence. They came by twos on motorcycle, one driver and one in the basket. They drove quickly down Nowomiejska-Zgierska Street, and then apparently turned around and came back. They probably reported that there was no opposition, or, as I thought at the time, they missed the city government buildings, which were on Plac Wolnosci (Freedom Plaza), about half a kilometer south of us. Thus began the German occupation and the horrible things to come.

On Saturday morning, large units of the German army entered the city. Among them were cavalry units. The soldiers came into the yard of Stary Rynek 15, which had a water well, to get water for their horses. That was the time when I could look them right in the eyes and gauge the measure of their hostile attitude. To my surprise, they were rather polite, joking, obviously happy victors. Many of them were blond and wore glasses. There was no killing of anybody. Not yet. At least this was what I observed at that moment.

Over the next several days, I could see the whole might of the German army passing through. Mechanized troops in trucks, which we had virtually never seen before in Poland, in a relentless drive forward, day and night, at full speed, rushing to conquer the entire country. I cannot recall seeing any tank units or heavy artillery. Maybe they were roaming through the

outskirts of Lodz, thus avoiding the city streets.

By the end of the first week of the occupation, I went back to our home to find that my parents and siblings had returned, all of them unharmed. They were the lucky ones. The German Luftwaffe attacked many of those who left the city and were marching toward Warsaw. Civilians, unarmed, were shot at systematically from low-flying planes over the potato fields where those refugees tried to find cover from the bombers. Many of them chased by machine gunfire perished. Did I say that they didn't kill anybody yet? Clearly I was wrong. But, at the time, I didn't see or know about it.

My older brother Samuel, who was faster than anyone else in our family, managed to reach Warsaw. There he endured the cruel bombardment of the city over the next two-to-three weeks, running from one burning building to another. After several more weeks, he too returned home but in very bad shape, limping from his injuries and exhausted. He stayed in bed for several weeks to regain his health and strength. But he was young, and he made it. His safe return was to play a critical role in my life over the next several years.

The civilized behavior of the Germans didn't last long. The terror started almost immediately. In order to treat Jews differently from the Poles and Germans, they ordered all Jews to wear yellow bands on their arms. They started indiscriminate round-ups of Jews on the streets. Whenever they needed people for work—to unload coal, to repair something, to move their people into abandoned or emptied houses—they rounded up people off the street. Several military trucks would suddenly stop, soldiers would run out and start calling “kome, kome,” and would chase people if they tried to run away. When they had the requested contingent, they would drive them away to the work place. As a rule, they would not feed them but would yell “schnell, schnell” at them and frequently beat them up. Most of the time, they would let them go when the

work was done. My Brother Samuel and myself were caught several times for such work. Almost simultaneously came the public humiliation of shaving the beards of Orthodox Jews in front of onlookers and smiling German soldiers. The German soldiers had fun doing this while those people suffered enormous humiliation, not infrequently being picked by their tormentors. I saw such pictures printed in the daily newspaper now under German management. Then came the order that all Jews would have to wear a yellow Star of David on their clothing. This made it easier for the Germans to distinguish between Jews and others and to apply the harsher policy to the Jewish population. At the same time, Jews were forbidden to use the city streetcar that went to the downtown area (beyond Place Wolnosci to the main street of Piotrkowska).

For a while, though, life returned to almost “normal.” My Uncle’s grocery store was reopened and, from time to time, German officers would buy something. I recall high-ranking officers looking for soap. They were surprised to see that soap had not disappeared from the shelves in my uncle’s store. Bread and other food items were very difficult to obtain in the area where we lived. We had to get up about 2 or 3 o’clock in the morning to get in the bread line when the bakery opened at 6 o’clock. We were prohibited by curfew from appearing that early in the morning, but we managed to avoid the patrols by hiding behind the gates of houses surrounding the bakery. I don’t recall German soldiers keeping order in the bread line. I remember one day standing in line for poppy-seed oil being sold to grocery stores. Aunt Sara gave me her certificate with which I could buy a large container (about 2-3 gallons) of oil. I was asked to deliver it to my parents since she didn’t think that the more affluent people in her neighborhood would buy this kind of oil, which they’d never heard of. It was a big help for our family though. The German soldier responsible for keeping order in that place was rather old, probably around 50. He was not too rude. Every once in a while he would walk along the queue, giving the

command “alles in die rie.”

One of the major events at the beginning of World War II was the occupation of eastern Poland by the Red Army, which was agreed upon in the Ribentrop-Molotov Pact of 1939. For Poland it, was a stab in the back that shaped its attitude toward the Soviet Union in addition to the traditional hate of the Russians. The Red Army moved into those territories on September 17, 1939, after most of Poland's army was defeated or on the run toward the eastern or southern regions of the country.

Sometime in September or early October 1939, rumors spread that, according to the agreement between the Soviets and Germans, the city of Lodz would be turned over to the Soviets. The rationale was that the old border from before World War I would be restored, and the Russians then occupied Lodz. The rumors were supported by a “visible” sign, a Soviet flag displayed on the government (Voivodship) building on Zachodnia Street. (This building was previously a beautiful mansion of the Jewish entrepreneur, Poznanski.) Many people, including myself, walked to the place and saw with their own eyes that, alongside a German flag, there was now a red Soviet flag displayed on the balcony of the Voivodship building. It was supposed to signify that a Soviet delegation was visiting the city and negotiating the turnover of Lodz. After several days, all the flags were German again.

Unfortunately, the red Soviet flag was only an illusion created by the wind. What actually had happened was that a German flag with the swastika in the middle had become twisted by the wind so that the Nazi sign was hidden from view. After several days, everything was straightened out and our hopes vanished.

One of the first victims of the German terror was the Jewish synagogues. Unceremoniously fire and dynamite destroyed them. The synagogue that I was deeply attached to

was on Wolborska Street. That's the place where I would attend services and listen to the wonderful choir led by Professor Zaks. That was the choir where many of my classmates from the Jakuba 10 Talmud Torah school were singing and where I aspired to one day be admitted as well. The synagogue was large and very beautiful. (Unfortunately, I haven't found pictures of the interior. The exterior is shown later in a photo.) There were other synagogues on Zachodnia 56 and on Aleje Kosciuszko 2 that were also destroyed by the German occupiers. The latter synagogue I attended only rarely since it was a reform synagogue, and, at that time, I couldn't convince myself that this was a place for me. The trouble was that people worshipping there didn't obey the most fundamental religious rules, like not smoking and not driving, or even using public transportation, on Sabbath. Nowadays, especially in the U.S., where the distance from home to a synagogue is several miles, people drive their cars without any remorse. That would have been unheard of in those days in Poland. Be it as it may, all synagogues were very dear to the Jewish community, and their destruction was a terrible crime.

The terror in the city intensified. There were shootings for any minor "insubordination." The most ominous sign of what we could expect in the future was the attempt by the occupants to destroy the tall monument of Tadeusz Kosciuszko on Plac Wolnosci, the symbol of Poland's struggle for independence. A group of Jews was compelled to destroy this granite monument with steel draws. Whether the Jews didn't try hard enough or their tools were inadequate, not much damage was done to the monument after several days of their efforts.

However, it did much damage to the Jews. This symbolic arrangement, where Jews were trying to bring down the revered symbol of Polish national heroism and freedom, was a clear provocation. Luckily, when November 11 approached, the date of the 1918 armistice and German defeat, a day the occupants desired to commemorate with the downfall of Kosciuszko's

monument, they had to use dynamite.

On the night of November 11, a loud explosion could be heard in the city. By the next morning, when I went to Plac Wolnosci, I saw our national symbol laying in ruin. The scale of terror escalated enormously. What I wasn't aware of then was the perfidious provocation designed to accuse the Jews of destroying the monument, thereby creating anger among the Polish population, and making a good excuse for punishing the Jews by destroying their shrines. Although the execution of that provocation misfired, the Nazis nevertheless destroyed all the synagogues in Lodz.

Jews started thinking seriously about leaving the territories occupied by the Germans. The only realistic place to go were the Polish territories then occupied by the Soviet Union. When this subject came up in our family conversations, my father's reaction was rather negative. His main point was that neither Hitler nor Stalin was allowing the Jews to practice their religion; hence, he reasoned that we may as well stay where we were. How wrong was my dear Dad. Yes, one could not freely pray under either of these regimes, but the chances of saving one's life were much greater under Stalin. This became clear much later. However, by the end of 1939, nobody could reasonably predict that, under Hitler, the possibility of surviving would be so extremely slim.

Many stories circled the city about the different ways from which to escape the Nazis. Some even involved the Germans themselves, who, apparently, for good money, provided transportation in their own military trucks. One day, a military truck arrived on Wesola Street where we lived, parked, and stayed for at least two days. We were sure this was one of those trucks that collected a group of escapees and transported them to the new German-Soviet border. Since these things were done secretly, I never learned whether this was actually the case.

Instead, a group of six people (including my brother Sam and myself) from our building

got together and started discussing the possibility of escaping. There were three young men from our neighbors' home downstairs (the wagoner's family) and Mr. Zylberszatz, who had a wife and two daughters; the older one was named Zlata and the younger one's name I don't remember. He decided to go to the territories taken over by the Soviets, arrange for a place to live, and come back for his entire family.

Although his reasoning seemed rational, it nevertheless was very naive. But movements back and forth across the new frontiers did take place in the first months of the German occupation. As it turned out, he was not able to return immediately to his family. What happened to him I learned after my return in 1945 to the place we lived.

My plans to escape were initially met with some concern by my parents. My mother repeatedly said that I was too young and that I didn't realize how difficult it would be. Father didn't intend to go; neither did my sisters or, of course, my baby brother, who was only nine years old at the time.

Leaving my parents and siblings should have been a difficult and painful decision. As I write this story, I am trying to analyze what went through my mind at that time, how I arrived at that decision, and why was it so firm in my mind. Was it just a youthful dream of a fantastic adventure? I don't believe this was the case. I got enough warnings from my mother about the difficulties and understood the dangers that lay ahead. As best as I can recall, it was the fear of remaining under German occupation that drove me to this decision. Intuitively, I felt that the future under the Nazis was very bleak. I couldn't imagine the complete annihilation of the Jewish people, but I could see that the Nazis were capable of killing on a whim. I had seen enough of this during the few months that I was under their occupation. And I have read enough about their atrocities in earlier-occupied countries like Czechoslovakia and Austria. I must admit that I was

not mature enough to convey my fear to others in my family and try to convince them that everybody should leave Poland. In this sense, I was selfish and cannot to this day forgive myself that shortcoming.

In addition, I probably had an exaggerated notion of how good it would be in the Soviet Union. That notion was not based on any ideological sympathy to Communism. On the other hand, I knew very little about the negative side of the Soviet regime. In the final analysis, escaping to the Soviet Union was the only realistic possibility.

I kept telling my older brother Sam that I intended to escape with him and the others from the building. I never received any clear acceptance; but they didn't dissuade me from going with them. I was aware of all their preparations and believe that they let me in on the discussions without fear that I would be any burden to them. Maybe they realized, better than I did at the time, that we would have little chance to stay together all the way to the Soviet Union. Sooner or later, they probably thought, the group wouldn't be able to stay together and, in that turmoil, everybody would have to face each new situation on his own. But, initially, we intended to escape as a group by the same means at the same time.

My preparations for that journey consisted of getting some money, a few shirts, and my new sweater. I continued working in my Uncle's store and was given some extra money from him, in addition to the regular tips I was still able to collect. My uncle was sympathetic to my plan, but Aunt Sara chided me for my intention to go to the "Reds." She knew more about the "Reds" than I did at the time; nevertheless, she was wrong.

I didn't know exactly the day when my brother and the others decided to go, although I felt that the day was imminent and I was prepared. I learned from our cousin Anna Szrojt that it was possible to survive many days on chocolate, or even better, on sugar and cocoa. I made sure

that I had a sufficient supply of these products in my knapsack and some bread.

To get bread, I still had to stand in line at a bakery in our neighborhood. While I was waiting, my younger sister Shajndl ran up to me and told me to rush home because they were leaving now. She took my place in line and, by doing so, saved my life. This was the last time I saw her.

Our journey started on a rainy day—appropriate weather for the occasion. We ordered a horse cab. Mother and my older sister Dvojra (Dora) saw us off, hidden in a gate on Bazarna Street. I wish I could better describe the picture that is so clearly depicted in my memory. Of course they were sad. But I also had the feeling they were proud of us, full of hope that our journey would be successful, and maybe that we would be able to help them as well. This is not what they told us, but what I now think that I read from their sad faces.

I cannot say whether we did everything possible to realize their hope. Only by reading this story can one judge whether we were worthy of their hope. I know that, even without clearly realizing this at the time, I intended to do the utmost to help them. I am willing to attribute to this moment the thought that I clearly realized somewhat later that I should come back on a Russian tank and liberate them. What I did to realize that dream and commitment would become known from the unfolding story of my life.

I wish I could recall other episodes of my farewell to my father and siblings, but my memory is completely empty. I must have said goodbye to all of them. Was I crying? I don't think so. It must have been a sign that I was totally concentrating on the trip, the conspiracy surrounding it and the difficulties that lay ahead, that I left our home without any marked sadness.

Fleeing the Nazis

It was late November 1939. We didn't meet any German soldiers on the way to the train station Lodz-Fabryczna. Even though there were many Jews in the station, I don't recall an incident with the Germans. Everything went smoothly. In retrospect, I'm willing to speculate that, at that time, the Germans were not interested in preventing us from leaving their occupied territories. "Let them go, there will be fewer of them here" was probably their thinking. However, the SS clearly desired to provide us with a "farewell beating." And they found a very convenient place for that.

After a short journey to the nearby city Koluszki, we changed trains. Our destination was Warsaw. In Koluszki, we had to take a small underground passage and go up to another track. There were many people going down stairs to reach the passage. At this point, SS officers were indiscriminately beating the crowd over the heads with truncheons. Luckily, they couldn't hit everyone, and they certainly missed the shorter people of which I was one. This was the first time that I had been in the middle of a beating. It was a huge crowd, not one-on-one, which would have scared the hell of me. Somehow, Sam also passed through the dangerous spot without being hit. Once on the other side of the passage, we took the stairs up to the track and boarded the trains headed to Warsaw.

Our journey was uneventful. We arrived in Warsaw late in the evening after curfew. We didn't have any particular place to go. We hoped that during the day we would find a place to stay

overnight and then continue our journey the following day. A late evening arrival had made our situation more difficult. We left the train station and walked along the main street (possibly Aleje Jerozolimskie). Suddenly, we saw some people peering out from the gate of a building. They asked us whether we were fleeing the Germans and needed a place to stay overnight. We were lucky again. These people had a very nice apartment and several more guests like us. They were religious Jews.

We didn't mind sleeping on the floor. As I recall, they also provided us with some food. All of this was done free of any charge just for the sake of helping Jews who were fleeing the Nazis. I wondered what the world would be like without such people.

The next day, we took a horse cart to the train station in Praga (a region on the east side of Warsaw across the Vistula River) where trains headed east depart. There were many Jews in that train and a sizeable number of Christians. No trouble or particular event is recorded in my memory about this part of the journey. Malkinia was the station on the German side of the new border with the Soviet Union. There, German soldiers immediately met us and ordered the Jews to go on one side and Poles on the other. I don't know how they treated the Poles, whether they let them go without any trouble.

The Jewish group, which numbered possibly close to a thousand, was shown which road to take. Along that country road, they and their belongings were checked three times. The soldiers who performed this function were polite. Why shouldn't they be? After all, they were interested in taking money, valuables, watches, etc. After they "freed" the people of all these things, they let them go. Well, not quite. How did we manage to get through these checkpoints and what were our losses? It's amazing how inventive and ingenious one can instantly become when faced with danger.

Soldiers set up five or six checkpoints where people lined up, forming long lines along the road. Most people didn't have heavy luggage, being aware of the difficulties awaiting them and making sure they wouldn't have to carry heavy things many kilometers. Most had little knapsacks, which the soldiers asked them to open. After being checked, the people would take their knapsacks, put their belongings back in them as quickly as possible, and continue marching along the road to the next checkpoint about half a kilometer away. This procedure gave us an idea: while we were still far from the head of the line, we should take our knapsacks down from our shoulders, mix up all the things inside, walk along the road, and pretend that we had already been checked by a soldier in another line. Luckily, it worked. And it worked three times, at least in our case. The reason it worked was that the soldiers were deeply involved in looking through the belongings of the currently checked person and didn't pay attention to what was going on around them. It is easy to understand that they were concentrating solely on grabbing valuables from their current victim and weren't interested in what was going on elsewhere. Is it true that Germans don't understand or aren't used to cheating? Good for us! However, I again was made to learn what kind of butchers they were. At the end of the checkpoints stood a small building, perhaps a little village school. In front of the building stood SS or Gestapo officers watching passersby and occasionally calling some of them inside the house. There they beat them nearly to death, leaving them with broken bones, bloodied heads, and severe limps. We witnessed many hundreds of them along the border over the next several days. But we were lucky again. The last German I met along the border before entering the so-called "neutral zone" was very polite and, I might say, very kind. He didn't ask us to take down the knapsack; he didn't beat us. He only had some good words, "so you are going to the Soviet paradise?" and offered us a cigarette. Unbelievable! He was of middle age and must have been mobilized for the war. I surmise that he knew more about

the Soviet Union than the current Goebbels propaganda admitted and was a decent man. Could he have been a social democrat?

Maybe I was under the influence of another propaganda, about the paradise in the Soviet Union. I recall when I was about eight years old, while walking with my friend Zelig, we stopped in front of a grocery store. We saw candies in the window, and Zelig told me, “You know what? In Russia, children can have candies free.” I don’t know where he got this idea from, but it stuck in my mind and perhaps was a factor in my favorable thinking about the country I was about to enter. The reality, however, was quite different. Instead of a welcome to the paradise, we were met by a closed border.

By the time we arrived, the border had already been closed for several days. About ten thousand people, including many elderly, children, and those injured by Gestapo torture, were camping under the open skies without food, shelter, or hope. In the next several days, many more thousands arrived, but the border was still closed. So it looked like the Germans wanted us out but the Soviets didn’t want us in. We were trapped.

The situation became desperate. The only water source was located in the “neutral zone,” closer to the German than the Soviet side. People tried desperately to get some water, while the Germans were shooting at them. The only salvation could come from the Soviet side. But the orders were firm: “Don’t let them in!”

From time to time, desperate people tried to run fast through to the Soviet side. Each time the Soviet soldiers would shoot at them, aiming at their legs. When this didn’t work, we began preparing to storm the border by force, that is, by pushing ourselves through the bayonets of the border guards.

At first, we were gentle; we just pushed ahead and the Soviets pushed us back. Many

people would open their shirts, bare their chests, and yell at the soldiers to shoot. Obviously, they would not. The next, more desperate attempts to break through were better organized. Women with children, as well as those who had been tortured by the Gestapo, would go in front. Then, strong young men pushed ahead. We were thousands and they were only a few platoons on the frontier. We overwhelmed them, pushed them aside, and crossed the border. Feeling victorious, we started singing proletarian songs and marched ahead a few hundred yards. Then enforcement on horses arrived and pushed us back. No victory yet. The next day, more refugees arrived and the crowd got bigger and even more desperate.

It was already the seventh or eighth day since we arrived at the border. My brother Sam and I had swollen legs and hands caused by cold and hunger. Many times I recalled that mother said it would be difficult. A few more days and it would have been a catastrophe. Medical assistance was not available, the food ran out, and it started snowing. I wandered about that huge place without hope, observing how whole families with elderly members and small children were camping on the frozen soil with hardly any blankets.

Through all of this, though, there were tragi-comic moments as well. In the middle of this open space between borders stood one large barn full of straw. This was the only place where one could warm up and even get a little sleep. There were hundreds upon hundreds inside this barn. New arrivals at night had to walk through the darkness, stepping over lying bodies until some little space could be found. Those left outside, and there were thousands of them, wanted to go in for a while, but could do it only if those who were inside could somehow be lured out. And the “outsiders” found a workable trick. They started yelling that the Soviets had opened the borders for only one hour. Obviously, nobody wanted to miss this opportunity. People started leaving the barn in a hurry. Then the outsiders went in. After several such tricks, everybody knew it wasn’t

true. Despite this awareness, people would still leave the barn, thinking “maybe this time, it’s true?”

The next storm along the Soviet border was very strong. After several hours of pushing, yelling, and screaming, we broke through. This time we went far inside the Soviet territory, perhaps a mile or so. Again, we triumphantly marched along the road and people intoned the proletarian songs. A strong cavalry unit met us and managed to push us back. But, we gained new experience and learned how to disperse along the road. When we broke through the next time, they were unable to push us back. Although we gained territory, it by no means meant that we were free to go forward.

The commander of the cavalry unit that met us about three miles inside Soviet territory started negotiating with us. First, he asked us why we were coming over to their side. Our answers were that we were fleeing the fascists and that we wanted to lead a productive life in the Soviet Union.

“Are you working-class people,” the commander asked?

“Yes, we are. Look at our hands!”

“Could you promise not to push yourself further and I will inquire at our headquarters whether to let you in?”

“Yes, we do.”

“Then,” said the commander, “Wait here. It will take me about two-to-three hours until I return.” We promised to behave and waited anxiously for his return. After about three hours, we saw him coming back, bringing the good news that we would be allowed to enter the USSR.

Refuge in Soviet-occupied Eastern Poland

Immediately after getting permission to enter the Soviet Union, soldiers arranged for our registration. In addition to names and dates of birth, they asked us where we wanted to go. Nearly everyone said Moscow or Leningrad. They dutifully wrote this down without a smile. We didn't understand at the time how naive our wishes were. Very few Soviet citizens were allowed to settle in those large metropolitan centers because of overcrowding. There was another important reason that we learned about much later. The food supply conditions were much better in these cities; hence, there was pressure to settle there by many people living in places where conditions were much worse.

I registered the year of my birth as 1923 instead of 1925, the correct year, in order to be eligible to work. (In the USSR, 16 years old.) After these formalities, we were free to continue our journey. I don't recall the Soviets providing us with any food. We undertook a march of about 6-7 kilometers to the nearest village, Zaremby Koscielne, where we arrived late in the evening. There, we entered a house, where, for the first time in nine days, we slept in a warm place and got hot food. We paid for this with the money we still had and with a few pairs of socks.

The next day, we found out that the trains were running very sporadically from this village and that we would have a better chance to catch a train in the city of Lapy, a distance of 25-30 kilometers from where we were. Without hesitation, we undertook the march to Lapy. Our final

destination was Bialystok, a larger city with a sizeable Jewish population. There were two large cities in the former eastern Poland where the bulk of refugees from the Nazi occupation tended to settle: Bialystok and Lwow. Most refugees initially intended to find some place to live and work there and some even dreamed of returning to the German-occupied territories to bring their families and relatives. We didn't have such clear plans. Had we been able to find favorable circumstances in Bialystok, we might have thought about such a maneuver. As it turned out, reality was much harsher than we expected, and any dream of going back and doing it again rapidly dissipated. Our real dream at the time was to survive the ordeal we were already in.

At Lapy, trains were running infrequently and were always overcrowded to the extreme. People were even climbing on the roofs of the cars just to get a chance to reach Bialystok. On the second or third attempt, we got on a train and managed to arrive safely in Bialystok.

The city looked neat and clean, without any war damage but with more than double its normal population. By the time we arrived, close to 250,000 refugees were there—in a city of approximately 150,000-200,000 permanent residents before the war.

Where does a Jew go when he arrives in a strange place? The obvious place is the synagogue. So we did. The place was overfilled with refugees. We barely found a place on the floor and spent several nights there.

Jews from Bialystok were very friendly to the refugees. We were invited to a Jewish family's home for a Sabbath meal of the traditional *tschulent* (potatoes, meat, barley, and beans baked overnight in the bakery's oven and retrieved Saturday at noontime after the prayers). The city's calmness and friendly attitude toward the newcomers was partly the result of its fortunes of not feeling the war and enjoying the benefits of continuity. The Red Army, presumably, immediately brought the feeling of order and may have even arranged for increased food supplies.

After several days of aimlessly wandering in Bialystok, we were offered, along with many others, a place to stay in a resort area perhaps some 10-15 kilometers outside the city.

This new place was located in an area where Bialystok Jews used to spend their summer vacations. It was a large village with rather primitive housing without water, sewage, or heating. Unfortunately, the windows were broken in most of these bungalows. Nevertheless, it was much less crowded than the synagogues. Regular food supply was organized, and the situation started to gain some semblance of normalcy.

By this time, it was already December and the nights were very cold. Luckily, we were assigned to a house with families who had small children. That meant we had priority in putting a little oven (built of bricks) in the middle of the room. So the first day we arrived, we could at least get some hot tea. However, it was very cold sleeping on the floor at night since the windows were still not fixed. My sweater, which I managed to take with me, served me well at night, since I could put my legs in it and keep them warm. The light coat I had became my blanket. It was better than nothing and certainly better than conditions along the Soviet-German border. We spent several weeks in that place. In a few days, the windows were repaired, and we could then stay comfortably there.

However, this was not to last long. The place was meant as a temporary shelter. The authorities were working hard to recruit us for work deep in the Soviet Union. The deal they offered us was to sign an annual contract to work in a particular city, after which we would be free to go any place in the USSR. The offices, which formalized these contracts, were located in Bialystok. This meant that, during the severe winter of 1940, which was now at full strength, with temperatures reaching -30 -40 degrees C., we had to walk on foot about 30 kilometers both ways. I clearly was not prepared for that. My clothes were not adequate for this kind of weather. As was

the custom in those days, boys of my age did not yet wear long pants, even in the winter. The typical outfit was short pants and socks and relative light shoes (leather or resin-made). In addition, because my parents were very poor, I didn't have a good winter coat that could compensate for the rather light outfit.

If I was a burden at any time to my brother Sam, this was one of those moments. We started our march on a very frosty morning. After several initial kilometers, I started to feel the frostbite acutely. We looked for a house on the way and stopped to warm up and maybe get a glass of hot milk. It helped initially and we could continue walking. But the frost got to me very soon. Increasingly, I begged my brother to go into a house. I could no longer endure the cold. Literally, parts of my body started freezing. I cried. I could not go on.

Somehow, with many stops on the way, we reached the city. We registered for work in the city of Omsk, which lies in the western part of Siberia. We got new Soviet temporary documents and an advance of several hundred rubles. We felt good—we felt rich—and intended to return to our village to prepare for our departure in a few days.

But someone had stolen my brother's document. Without it, we couldn't go. We then returned to the office where we received our assignment and reported the lost document. The military officer, who heard that news, started screaming, calling us all kinds of names, nearly ready to shoot us. "You swindlers, you parasites, what did you do with the money?" It took us many explanations to get through to him that we didn't lose the money, only one document. Yet he kept yelling until finally it sunk in that we might not be swindlers after all, since we didn't claim losing the money they gave us. He calmed down, took away my document and assignment and started preparing a new one.

After a couple of hours, our new assignment was ready. This time it was Novosibirsk,

some 500 kilometers deeper into Siberia. We made sure that no one stole our documents or money.

On the way to Novosibirsk, we learned a new Russian song called *Katiusha*. The name of a Russian girl, this title was also adopted for the most powerful piece of artillery used during the Soviet-German war. But, we fell in love with this serene, peaceful song, which sounded so different from all we knew until now. Maybe this song was a necessary antidote to the miserable conditions we traveled in.

The train consisted of many freight cars, or as we called them, cattle-trucks. On each side, there were two levels of boards and in the middle of the car an iron stove, which was always red-hot. It was the middle of that severe winter and we were moving across Russia toward the Ural Mountains and Siberia, where winter is always severe. There were no toilets in the cars and no water. The walls inside the car were white frosted, especially in the remote corners and near the doors where cold air penetrated inside. The red-hot stove could not warm up the inside of the car, except in its closest proximity.

The journey under these conditions took us 21 days, mainly because our echelon got the lowest priority in the overburdened railroad system. Whenever the authorities could feed us, however, they did it in great style. At each station of the large cities we were served an elegant dinner in the station's restaurant, which was closed to the public during the time we were served. The only trouble was that, on many occasions, we didn't arrive on time when dinner was ordered to be ready. A few times we had dinner late, after midnight. But we were grateful for that since we had only so-called "dry rations" between these meals.

One of the first Russian words we learned was *kipiatok*, meaning hot water. Kipiatok signs, posted in each large or small railway station, were one of the best inventions of the Soviet

railroad. A cup of hot tea and a piece of bread provided a very good meal during those cold days and nights.

Our echelon was usually parked on secondary lines, sometimes far away from the railway station, where we would go for the elegant dinners or to buy something to eat in addition to the rations. On one such walk from the car to the station, I got serious frostbite in my foot. Although we had not stopped far from the main building, we were now in the Urals. At -40 -50 degrees C., it's not difficult to get frostbite when you're wearing light leather shoes and thin socks. My foot took many months to heal. It bothered me in the falls and winters for the next twenty or more years.

Journey to Novosibirsk: From the cattle car to a lavish reception

We arrived in Novosibirsk late in the afternoon and were immediately transferred from the railroad to a public bath by very strange-looking buses, very much like American school buses. Everyone received completely new underwear of violet color, warm cotton-stitched pants, a *kufajka* (cotton-stitched, short overcoat), and a pair of woolen footwear. This was an outfit proper for the Siberian winter.

After this wonderful bath and new outfit, more pleasant surprises were awaiting us. They loaded us onto the same buses and drove us to the place of accommodation—a large, unfinished six-story building. As it turned out, they hastily finished up three floors for the newcomers and located the families with children on one floor and the unmarried people on the other floors. We were given a large room for six single men. The beds were the types one can find in a dormitory or hospital—iron beds with new blankets and white linens. Each had a small bedside table and a chair. In the middle of the room was a table on top of which was a tin kettle with hot water. Every so often, a woman would knock at the door and bring fresh, hot water so that, at any time, we could drink hot tea. Several weeks later, we would serve hot water ourselves by going to the boiler located on each floor. There was also a large oven installed in the kitchen on the floor where families with children lived.

It was about 8 or 9 o'clock in the evening when we finally settled in our room. Then we were invited for a lavish reception. The food included all kinds of fish, some of which we had

never seen before (sturgeon, for example). There was a broad selection of cold meat cuts, breads, fruits and cookies. It was instant “communism,” since we could eat as much as we desired, and, at the end, a lot of food was still left over. The authorities brought a dance ensemble to the party that performed Russian folk dances for us. We had never seen this before and were immensely impressed. The party lasted until about 3 o’clock in the morning.

After the party, we had a short night’s sleep. Early in the morning, visitors knocked at our door. The most senior party and government officials had come to welcome us while we were still in bed. Extremely well dressed and looking very rich and healthy, they greeted us, “Good morning, comrades. Welcome to our city. We are glad to have you here, brothers from Belorussia. How was your terrible life under the Polish masters?”

It was the most surprising part of the welcoming ceremony. How highly they regarded us, how caring and happy they were that we finally had been liberated from the Polish oppression. We didn’t understand that attention given to us. The orders they followed must have been very strong: “Put up a fantastic show of our system of government.” And a fantastic show they really prepared for this first party of liberated Belorussians in the city of Novosibirsk.

When all this took place, hundreds of people on the first floor were forming a line at 2 o’clock in the morning to buy a loaf of bread when the grocery store opens at six or seven in the morning. The first floor was still an unfinished construction site, filled with the smell of acetylene used in welding. In that terrible place, hundreds of local people were struggling to preserve their place in line, along with others who hoped to cheat their way ahead or who would press themselves against the entrance of the store when it opened.

Even more disturbing was the rule established for the entry to the grocery, which was to let all Belorussians go in without staying in line. Their rationale was that we had come from a

terrible country where the Polish masters exploited us, had experienced a terrible life thus far, and therefore deserved better treatment here in the proletarian land.

And if this wasn't sufficient, we got a special corner in the shop where a huge block of butter was put on the counter, along with a good selection of sausages and even hard chocolate. All these items were not available for the local people, in either this or any other store. What were those people thinking when they saw us buying all those goodies unavailable to them? What a terrible disregard for their own people! At least they would set up such a special shop in some invisible place. Either they didn't understand it or they didn't care what their people were thinking about them. How terrorized these people must have been to remain essentially silent about all of this. They didn't show strong resentment toward us, but perhaps they were able to hide their feelings well. After a few days, when we ventured out to the downtown shops, we learned that the same rule of letting us in without standing in line was applied here as well. Moreover, this was not a short-term arrangement. It was in place the whole year we were there.

Returning now to the description of our new living quarters. On one of the floors, a so-called "red corner" was organized. It was a special room where we could come in and read newspapers or other propaganda material, as well as assemble for lectures and so forth. The first night's party was held there. What struck me among the propaganda materials was a theme I already knew from reading the German occupants' paper in Lodz. The subject was Marshal Voroshilov and "Voroshilov Shooters." Since September 1939, the Germans and Soviets had become "good friends." One day, the German occupation paper, *Lodzianka*, printed a big story about the Red Army, its qualities and armaments. Among this Goebels propaganda material was a story about what good sharpshooters the Soviets are because they train young men (and women?) in a special youth organization or *Osoviachim*. After achieving good results, participants receive a

badge called *Voroshilovskii Strielok*. I remember how this story struck me as improbable just a few months earlier when all the Nazi propaganda aimed at Jews and Communists. And suddenly they're so friendly? Now I saw the propaganda about the grandness of Marshal Voroshilov and his sharpshooters here at the source, praising him the same way the Goebels propaganda did over there. But I still didn't realize all the ramifications of what was happening in the world political arena, although I was in the middle of it, both a victim and a first-hand observer.

Nonetheless, I was comfortable and happy to be on this side of the world stage, facing this completely new and unknown world. The next day, an officer came and showered money on us. We received, according to some rule, an advanced payment for work we had not yet performed. Moreover, they didn't even rush us to accept the jobs that were waiting for us and for which we came here in the first place. During the next several days, they finally started talking about job assignments.

Very few people were assigned according to their wishes, experience, or occupational training. Most were sent to the nearby construction site of a textile mill. Even women, who had never worked at all, not to speak of doing construction work, were sent to this place.

My brother Sam was assigned to a nearby sawmill in the yard where timber was unloaded. The team he worked with pushed in the timber to be sawed and then removed the boards. The temperature during that winter reached nearly -50 degrees Celsius, which, when accompanied by strong winds, was extremely dangerous and unbearable. And yet people were working outside that sawmill and my brother, completely unaccustomed to it, with them. What a change that was from a job I remember he had in 1939 before the war in a factory producing women's socks, where he would put the socks on metal forms and place them in a steam oven. He was doing that work during the hot summer. And now he was working in the opposite extreme of Siberian cold.

My assignment was much easier, since officially I was only 16 years old. They sent me to the carpentry shop, which was located not far from the sawmill. Both these units were parts of the same company. Within the carpentry section, which produced doors and windows for the industrial and residential buildings being erected nearby, they established a carpentry vocational school for youngsters of my age. There was one instructor for the whole class of about 30 boys. His name was Innokenty Grigorowich, a military veteran who nearly always wore a Red Army hat, whose top had a spiel that could be expanded to cover his ears. He was also a very good storyteller and was frequently under the influence of alcohol.

With the passage of time, the liberated Belorussians started looking around, getting acquainted with local people and learning more about real life in Novosibirsk. One of my acquaintances, Sergej, was a very interesting man who lived in the same building. I was not sure what he did for a living. He and his wife were professionals of some kind, but their life together was strange. They rarely were together; at least at the time I was invited to their apartment. Sergej's hobby was the accordion, which he played very well. I always enjoyed listening to his music, which consisted mostly of Russian folk melodies. He even tried to teach me to play, but I wasn't good at it.

Otherwise, he was always pleasant to me, often offering some snacks and enjoying my company. He was also the mechanic at the movie club. I used to go with him there, where he showed movies every Saturday or Sunday. He taught me how to operate the film equipment, rewind the film reel, and fix minor problems, such as ruptured reels. It seemed to me that he couldn't have been doing all of this without some aim in mind or order from somebody. But I never experienced any improper behavior or trouble caused by my friend Sergej.

Some of the other people's acquaintances enlightened them about real life. One of our

friends, I think his name was Jakub, learned a lot about the Stalinist persecution in the most recent past. He would come to our room and tell us the horror stories about people being jailed for nothing or the smallest transgression. Ten-year sentences were the mild ones and our friend would each time bring another case to our attention. He became paranoid on that subject, terrorized by the fear that it could happen to any one of us. I didn't understand at the time how real the danger was and ignored those stories. I should also mention that, when the Soviet-German war started, this same friend volunteered in the Red Army and we soon received the tragic news that he had been killed in action. I learned later, when I was in the Army myself, that people overtaken by fear were more frequently the casualties of war.

The stories brought back from meetings with townspeople were not the worst things. More acute were the working conditions for some of us, especially for the women. In the spring, snow melted into huge puddles and mud covered the streets, making them almost impassable. Those poor women would come home exhausted, mud covering their heavy shoes. A few of those young women attempted suicide because working conditions were so unbearable for them.

Our earnings were relatively low but they were sufficient for the rather limited food that we could buy, mainly potatoes, on the free market and an occasional small piece of meat. My earnings were very low (115 rubles) since I was a trainee. But my brother's pay was not very high either (about 200-250 rubles), although it was never clear how much he earned because it all depended on the amount the foreman would write down and the pay per unit.

People who managed to get a job in town in garment factories, for example, were doing somewhat better, because they were very good workers, fulfilling 300-400 percent of the norm. But then their coworkers resented them because they showed that much higher productivity could be achieved. The local people knew better. Whenever higher productivity was achieved, the pay

per piece was lowered (or the norm increased) so that their take-home pay did not increase commensurably, if at all. Despite all this, we could live at that rather low level of comfort, since we had enough to eat and we didn't expect much more.

Many times in our conversations we turned to the plight of our parents and siblings. From time to time, we got letters from them that didn't reveal too much about their real situation because letters were checked by German censors. But we understood by reading between the lines that life was very difficult for them. From Novosibirsk, there was no possibility of sending them any food. Apart from lack of money, which we could somehow spare, there was nothing that we could buy in our place, except perishable items like potatoes or meat, which we could get from the "kholchoz market." Even if we could get some grouts, there was no way we could send it to the occupied territories in Poland.

My prospects of becoming a carpenter grew slimmer with each month of "training." Our instructor spent most of the time in the men's room, where he could smoke his pipe and tell stories. We, the trainees, had to produce a very primitive frame for the brick plant. The frame was used to place new bricks for drying.

In the spring of 1941, I became fed up with the whole arrangement and decided to complain to the city prosecutor's office. I went to this office and described the situation exactly as it was. The prosecutor was a friendly, nicely dressed woman of middle age. She met me with great warmth and sympathy and promised that the office would look into the matter and give me an answer within a few weeks at my next visit.

I was proud of myself and obviously very naive since I didn't realize what was going on in the city, how many people were sent away to labor camps for no good reason. But I believed in the system and in justice and couldn't understand how the government could tolerate such waste

of our time and money.

On my next visit to the prosecutor's office, the same woman, previously so friendly, met me with incredible hostility. She literally jumped at me from the moment I opened the door. "You German fascist. You came here to spread Nazi propaganda. Get out of here!" I was astounded. I couldn't understand what happened. I could be called all kinds of things, but clearly not a Nazi or fascist. Why such a change of attitude on her part? When she calmed down a little, she asked me whether it was true that I gouged (grooved) swastikas on pieces of wood in the shop. Aha, there it is! It was true; I did it without any particular aim when I was bored.

It was a bad habit that many kids used to have during the pre-war years in Poland. It was the same as any doodle, except that this was the sign most often "coming out" from the unwitting use of a pencil, or in this case a chisel. I tried to explain this to her, but to no avail. She kept hollering at me and finally ordered me out of her office. From whom did she learn that I did that? During the interval between my first and second visits to her office, she obviously got in touch with the management of the carpentry shop. My instructor, knowing about the doodling, was looking for a way out for himself. And I had given him a golden opportunity by chiseling the swastika on a piece of wood, which was too small to be used for anything except burning. He grabbed that piece of wood from me, led me into the manager's office, and made the case against me that all I was doing was carving swastikas on our output, which was then sent to the brick plant and, in this way, I was spreading Nazi propaganda. Hearing this, the prosecutor quite naturally took the management's position and kicked me out of her office. I lost my case.

This was only the beginning of my troubles with the "law enforcement" authorities. Lack of perspective, low earnings, and the possibility of making more money elsewhere turned my attention to "speculation." It was simple. Since we could buy items that were in short supply

without standing in line for many hours and sometimes days, we could easily resell them at a profit. There were not many such items, but still a few here and there. Sometimes I could buy a suit or a sweater, or linens, cloths and rubber boots (galoshy). I did this a couple of times and was not caught.

The problem was elsewhere. About 1939 or 1940, new laws were passed in the Soviet Union that introduced stiff penalties for absenteeism at work or for tardiness. The penalty for arriving more than twenty minutes late to work three times was an earnings deduction of 15-25 percent. For being absent for several days, the penalty was 3-6 months in prison. In order to buy goods for resale, one had to be near the department stores in the downtown area, not in the carpentry shop. Obviously, I took some time off to make money and was immediately sued by the company.

The justice system of the Soviet Union, in most cases, consisted of a suit being launched by somebody, in most cases by the prosecutor's office, which was then adjudicated by a judge and two jurors. The jurors were often elected from the general public. The same jurors would then participate in all cases brought before a given judge or court. The jurors had practically nothing to say. At best, the judge would explain to them what the law said and what the penalty should be. They agreed probably one hundred percent of the time. They also didn't have much to say about a guilty or innocent verdict, although there probably was some discussion at the chamber in cases that didn't have any political overtones (almost any case could be phrased in political tones, if necessary).

My case was heard in a chamber in the presence of a young woman judge and two jurors, also young women. The first question was about my name and date of birth. Since this was already 1941, and I was at that time almost 16 years old, I decided to tell them that officially I am

recorded as having been born in 1923 but the truth is that I was born in 1925. I explained why I did this and they accepted it without any further questioning. Then they established whether it was true that I didn't show up for work for several days, which I admitted and, at the same time, explained why I was disappointed with the place I was working. That's all.

After a brief recess, I was called back in the chamber and the verdict was announced by the judge: Not guilty, because I was still a minor, less than 16 years old and the new law doesn't apply to minors. I was surprised because I thought they might consider the lying about my age as an additional incriminating factor. I was happy!

About two weeks later, I was called again to a different court where my case was reconsidered. It turned out that some higher-level appellate court rejected the verdict and asked for it to be reconsidered. This time, the procedure was exactly the same. I stated the same facts, including the inaccuracy of my birth date. The verdict was exactly the same as in the first instance: Not guilty!

This was still not the end of it. In another two weeks, I was called in again. The next review rejected the verdict again. The argument was that, as a minor, I could not be imprisoned for missing a few days of work, but there was no justification for letting me go entirely free. At least I should pay a fine. So the verdict this time was that 25 percent of my miserable earnings should be deducted for three months.

However, the government could not collect these fines. It was already late spring and all our contract commitments to work in Novosibirsk had expired. We had learned from friends that in Ivanovo-Vozniesiensk, a city located in the European part of the USSR, one could buy sugar, flour, bread, and other food items. My brother and I decided several months earlier that we would try to move to Ivanovo as soon as possible. However, two important formalities had to be taken

care of. First, we needed a document that would entitle us to travel. The authorities offered all of us Soviet citizenship. Many refugees from Poland were afraid to accept it, fearful that it might preclude us from ever returning to Poland after its liberation. After all, we had left our families and relatives there. Besides, life in liberated Poland could be much easier than here in Siberia, or, for that matter, in any other place in the Soviet Union. People were counting on some turn of history when the Germans would be defeated, leave our country, and they could return home. Accepting Soviet citizenship might prevent us from going back when such an opportunity arrived. No sane person could have assumed at that time that our people would be annihilated and that there wouldn't be anybody alive to return to. But even such an improbable catastrophe couldn't be a reason to remain in the Soviet Union.

Despite the risk of not being able to return to Poland, we decided to accept the new passport, which allowed us to travel within the Soviet Union. Somehow, we believed that, when the occupation of our homeland ended, the conditions would be so different that we would be able to return home. Meanwhile, we gained some freedom and avoided a lot of trouble that the people who rejected that offer endured, including jailing for whatever minor transgression. Once one rejected the offer to become a Soviet citizen, one could be considered an enemy of the Soviet Union, with all the possible negative consequences.

The second formality was to get the train tickets, a very difficult task. Somehow we acquired the tickets, and one day we disappeared from Novosibirsk. The authorities didn't know about our plans and we managed to get out in time, before they could execute the last verdict.

Ivanovo-Vozniesiensk: Where one can buy sugar and flour

The journey back to Europe was much more pleasant than the one to Siberia. We got tickets on the coach wagon of the Moscow-Vladivostok train. The entire journey lasted only four days. The weather was pleasant since it was already May, and I considered it a nice gift for my birthday. In Moscow, we had to change trains. We decided to do a little sightseeing there and visit “the Moscow Uncle” of one of our roommates.

Each roommate had his special subject of conversation. This roommate often returned to the subject of his uncle living in Moscow. Another roommate was paranoid about persecution of innocent people. Others talked of resuming their efforts to get a job in a garment factory. Still others dreamed of going back to Poland when the Germans left our homeland. The roommate mentioned above would often change the conversation to the help he was going to get from his influential uncle who was living in Moscow. When we left Novosibirsk, he asked us to visit his uncle and tell him about his plight and desire to go to Moscow. We were glad to do that.

His Moscow uncle lived on Sadovo-Tchernogradskaia Boulevard. When we arrived in the city, we started looking for the place. It took us almost a full day of walking along boulevards that all were called Sadovo. Each time we asked people where Sadovo-Tchernogradskaia was, they told us “further ahead.” It turned out that Sadovo Boulevard formed a circle around the city and various fragments had different names added to the Sadovo name. Ultimately, we found the place.

Initially, the people staying in this uncle’s apartment didn’t want to let us in. They were

not sure we were truly messengers from their nephew in Novosibirsk. Somehow, we convinced them about this. Then it turned out that the uncle was not there. Where he was, they wouldn't tell us. Actually, they were afraid to talk about him. Slowly but surely we learned that the uncle was arrested, along with many others being persecuted by Stalin in the late 1930s. It was a very depressing visit indeed and we were very sorry for our friend in Novosibirsk, whose hopes were dashed by our visit. We would have to inform him of our discovery. Clearly, his relatives didn't want to ruin his dreams, and that is why the Moscow uncle was not helpful to his nephew. Having discovered the truth about the uncle, we continued visiting the most famous places in Moscow. Late in the day, we departed for Ivanovo, the last and relatively short leg on our journey from Siberia.

In Ivanovo, we rented a room in a single-family house on the 17 Line, not far from a furniture factory where I got a job as a carpenter. Sam got a job in a large textile mill and both of us started a new life. I decided to join the *Komsomol* (Young Communist League) and become a citizen like everybody else, thus avoiding possible trouble if they found out about my misbehavior in Novosibirsk.

The job in the furniture factory was relatively simple. It consisted of assembling frames for mattresses or sofas. All I had to do was prepare the glue, put it on the already prepared grooved boards, and assemble them. It was a boring job, but it had to be done fast and the rhythm of it was sufficiently exciting. The master carpenter under whom I worked was an alcoholic. From time to time, he would disappear for several days. That was the time when he was able to buy vodka, which was very difficult to get at that time. It probably was a period similar to the one introduced by the reformist Gorbachev, trying to reduce alcoholism and, at the same time, strengthen work discipline. The only difference was that, in 1940-1941, this reform was done under the cruelest

Soviet dictator.

At the nearby section in the carpentry shop, a small team of 3-4 workers was binding mattresses and sofas and upholstering them. The chief specialist of the group was a Polish communist who had been there since the end of 1939. He was a very handsome man in his late forties. After a few short weeks of working in the carpentry section, he offered me a job in his section, which I eagerly accepted. Now, I started learning upholstery. I liked it and learned pretty fast. Everything seemed to be working out for us. The earnings were not great, but were much better than in Novosibirsk. With what we earned, we could buy basic foods and sustain a reasonable standard of living.

For the first time, I was working in a place where many young women were also employed. I was not interested at that time in getting involved with girls, at least not in the work place. But others were freely playing with them, especially during lunch breaks. I was surprised to see how willingly the girls let themselves be cuddled and thrown on mattresses or other soft material, eagerly engaging men (not necessarily only young or unmarried) in albeit innocent, but still clear contact with all the interesting parts of their body. It was a surprise to me and only later did I understand that this liberal behavior was a result of the prevailing philosophy of free love and of the gender relationship in the Soviet Union. A war, albeit a limited one, was going on in 1940 with Finland, in which the Soviet Union sustained relatively high casualties. The persecution of its population in the 1930s was also heavily decimating the male population, as was the compulsory draft into the military. It all added up to an imbalance of the sexes, in “favor” of the female population. Thus, the women in our shop, as in many other places, were eager to engage men in whatever little pleasure they could derive from such caresses, even if it had to be in public. Soon this situation would get much worse.

All of this time that we were in the Soviet Union, we corresponded with our parents. True, they did not describe much of what was going on for fear that their letters were being read by the German authorities. Yet, we knew of their basic movements. By the end of the 1940 winter, they decided to leave Lodz and move back to Kamiensk, the little town where my mother's parents lived. Presumably, they thought it would be easier there because of the closer connection with the farmers from whom they might be able to get food in exchange for their wares or services. During that trip, which was undertaken in a horse cart, my father suffered some severe frostbite or cold that required hospitalization. Esther, my oldest unmarried sister, was working in a nearby village in a manor. Dvojra, my older sister, went to Tomaszow Mazowiecki, where she stayed with the Goldbergs, relatives from our father's site. The last letter we received from our parents was on June 18, 1941, a few days before the German-Soviet war started.

The war struck suddenly. It was a very nice sunny day. I was walking from the downtown area in Ivanovo back home to the 17 Line where we lived. I heard over the radio the first war communiqué. Now everybody's life in the Soviet Union would change. And, along with change, new opportunities for achieving my goal of fighting the Nazis would emerge. This was the best chance to get involved in the rescue of our parents and relatives. But instead of getting good news from the front lines, the news was rather grim. The praised Red Army was retreating. The German *blitzkrieg* was succeeding even here in the Soviet Union, as it had in many countries before.

Within a few weeks, life in the furniture shop changed radically. Even before the war started, preparations were being made to transform the plant into war-type production. For the last two weeks, a new team of engineers arrived and attempted to build a prototype of a vehicle that would run on an airplane motor, mounted at the tail of a wooden sleigh with two broad skis. They had less trouble with the wooden part than with the motor, which they couldn't start. Many

attempts were made before they finally succeeded.

We stopped producing furniture and switched to the production of boxes for artillery shells. There were two orders. Order #11 was a yard long and about one-half of a yard wide, a wooden box for six shells to be placed in the specially grooved planks. The box had an ordinary cover. Initially, management tried very hard to obtain very smooth grooves so that the shells would lay there and experience no friction while being loaded and transported onto the train or on trucks closer to the front lines.

Order #53 was a similar box, but of smaller dimensions. As in similar cases elsewhere, initially they tried very hard and responsibly to follow the prescription developed by the military. Most of the work preparing the planks (cutting, grooving, etc.) was done on a huge machine, which looked like a large tank, steel conveyers moving in all directions. The conveyers could be adjusted to particular dimensions of the parts being run through. While the wooden parts were moving, various operations were performed on them, such as cutting to the proper size, grooving, making holes, etc. It was a very efficient machine and only the most experienced machine operator was allowed to work there.

Within a few weeks, however, all men able to carry arms were mobilized for army duty. Only the young, like myself, very old men, and women remained in the plant. All workers were organized in two 12-hour shifts and entrusted with the task of not only continuing the war production, but also increasing it as much as possible. I was transferred to work initially on the assembly line; then, after a couple of months, I became the operator of the big tanklike machine. True, I didn't know at the time how to arrange it properly, but after the daughter of the old master Gerasimov arranged everything, I found I could operate the machine easily. Initially, it was even fun.

The big machine was not the bottleneck or limiting factor in the whole operation. It was the other machines, especially the assemblage of the boxes, which was done mostly by hand that was limiting output. Therefore, we were often sent to help the team that was assembling and finishing the boxes. The team consisted of a whole family of Polish refugees—a father about 62 years old and his three sons, all youngsters not yet subject to the draft. They were extremely productive. They were so fast that nobody could even approach the speed with which they screwed in the tops and bottoms of the boxes.

Twelve-hour shifts and insufficient food had its effect on our strength. But we were still young and didn't mind working hard for this joint cause of defeating the Nazis. We got used to consuming the whole allotment of bread for two days in one sitting. Then, we had to wait another two days to get the next ration. In the meantime, we could get a cup of soup daily, sometimes with two ounces of meat for which we had to use one-tenth of the monthly ration of meat. Instead of the four-pounds of bread for the two days, we could buy two pounds of flour. We would then cook the flour with water (no fat or oil was available) and eat in one sitting somewhat less than the two-day ration. Our rations were still better than those of people working for the civilian economy, which were one and a half pounds of bread daily instead of the two pounds for people working on military-related needs. Non-working senior citizens got only one pound of bread daily. I think we also got one pound of sugar and a similar amount of meat or sausage per month. The earnings we received for our work were not worth much since a loaf of bread cost about 100 to 150 rubles on the market, an amount earned for at least two weeks of work.

All this was not the worse thing that happened to us. Late in the fall of 1941, all Party and Komsomol members were called in for an emergency meeting by the chief engineer, Koshelev, who was also the head of the party cell. The message he conveyed to us was extremely grim and

troublesome: We might end up under German occupation overnight. The Germans were near Moscow. The chief engineer told us that the blitzkrieg tactic the Germans were using consisted of an onslaught of large tank units, which moved ahead at full speed if they didn't encounter any resistance; they stopped only when they had exhausted all of their fuel, sufficient for some 300 kilometers. When they arrived at their destination, airborne units parachuted and occupied the place. After that, army units moved in and mopped up any resistance. Since we were about 300 kilometers from Moscow, it was quite possible that, at any moment, we might find ourselves under German occupation.

The city authorities, therefore, decided to distribute all valuable inventories from the textile mills, warehouses, etc. among the population so that they would not fall into the hands of the occupier. Everyone could receive a large amount of clothing or other items with just their signature, without any charge. Maybe later they would be charged for some of these acquisitions. Naturally, Ivanovo got into a fearful frenzy. Everyone was carrying clothes from the textile factories. The city was preparing for the possible occupation. Party members and officials were prepared to evacuate or to join the underground. *Narodnoe Opoltszenie* (local defense units), which consisted of elderly men marching back and forth, were singing the ominous military song: "*Idiot voina narodnaya*," meaning "the people's holy war is going on ...raise our big land for the deadly battle." Despite my successful escapes to date, I was now close to being caught again by the Germans.

But things were not that favorable for the Germans. The Red Army finally stopped them at the outskirts of Moscow. Instead of moving ahead deeper into the cold, they tried to consolidate their offensive. Looked at differently, they had met the Russian winter and concentrated on surviving it. The Russians, on the other hand, were used to their winter and were able to

concentrate overwhelming power, mobilizing units from Siberia. Not only were they able to stop the advancing German military machine, they launched successful counter-attacks, pushing the Germans back and away from Moscow. Thus, the danger of falling in their hands again faded away, at least for the time being. No need to escape again.

Banished from the Red Army: Escape from a Siberian coalmine

In the spring of 1942, I volunteered to join the Red Army. It was my hope that, after enlisting and a short training period, I would join the struggle against the Germans. Unfortunately, on my Soviet passport, the number 37 was written. I didn't realize at the time that it indicated that I was a foreigner who didn't have all the rights of a native citizen. In this particular case, it meant that the authorities should not trust me and enlist me in the regular Red Army. Instead, I was sent to the so-called "Working Battalions." They were under the command of "The General Management of Airfield Construction" (GUAS in Russian). These battalions were used during the summer months to build new airfields close to the front lines. From these airfields, tactical airplanes would rise to assist advancing units or in the defense against the German offensive. In other instances, those airfields were used for long-distance air strikes. The planes would usually take off at sunset and return after a long-range mission at dawn the next day.

In the wintertime, the airfields were serviced by the GUAS units, which was limited to cleaning the airfields of snow during the day so the planes would be able to take off on those missions. We would get up early in the morning, at 5 o'clock, and march in columns toward the airfield. There, after an hour of marching under very difficult snow conditions, sometimes losing our way because of the blowing snow that would cover the narrow path along which we were supposed to march, we would end up in the middle of the runway. In such cases, which happened often, military men would shoot red rockets at us so we would know we were in a place we

shouldn't be. The direction from which the rockets came would tell us which way to go. It looked like a game between our columns and the military men shooting at us, but it actually was very dangerous to be there because this was also the time when the bombers would return from their night missions.

After arriving at the huge kitchen barrack, we would stand in line for the hot morning soup and a piece of bread. The soup was usually very thin, a lot of water and not much substance. One has to remember that these were the worse times in the Soviet Union, when the country still suffered from the advances of German troops, especially in the Ukraine from where the Soviets used to get their food supplies. So our morning soup reflected that situation. Also, our food ration presumably was more meager than in the regular army units.

After this breakfast, we would go out and shovel snow away from the middle of the airfields. It was extremely cold and we suffered a lot. By the end of the day, we would reassemble in the kitchen barrack, where we would get another soup or porridge and march back to the village where we were stationed. We didn't have any arms, so our military training was minimal, just knowing how to march in columns. Nevertheless, the unit commanders tried to keep some semblance of military discipline with very meager results.

It is important to realize what kind of people these units enlisted. First were the foreigners. Even though, a few years ago, we were considered liberated Belorussian brethren, now we were, at best, recognized as second-class citizens, to whom the regime didn't entrust giving arms or participating in the struggle against the invaders. These units also enlisted people who, in the past, were accused of "counter-revolutionary activity", that is, those who were jailed on the famous paragraph 58 of the criminal code. They already served their terms and were now technically free. There were also children and close relatives of people who were considered "enemies of the

people,” that is, those that the Stalin regime accused of anti-government activity. Not only were they sent away to labor camps, but their relatives were also mistrusted and thus not accepted in the regular army. Hence, a significant part of the units’ personnel were experienced labor camp prisoners who knew well the life and order of the camps. Quite often, they would simulate illness in order not to go to work. No medical personnel, except for a few nurses and a paramedic, were available to confirm real illness, so they could easily simulate it. They also knew all kind of tricks to feign a high fever and thus be excused from going to work and, at the same time, remain eligible for the daily food ration. Some of those may have actually been sick but not recognized as such. Without food, they were rapidly slipping into complete exhaustion. Some of them would be taken away to hospitals or even be allowed to die.

The group consisting mostly of ex-labor camp prisoners would play cards all night and thus be unable or willing to march to work in the morning. They adhered to very strict rules of the blackjack game. They played for money or other real things, such as cigarettes, food rations, and even their wives at home if they were married. The stakes were sometimes extremely high and the atmosphere tense. Around the table, in addition to the players, were observers who got a lot of excitement without risking their own valuables. But they liked to stand behind a player and watch the cards as he received them and revealed to their own eyes in a very deliberate, slow manner to increase the excitement and also hide from the other players the true value of their cards.

Although the payment had to be made, the players were obviously not very honorable men. Some of them tried to cheat. On such occasions, a quarrel would erupt that sometimes ended in a serious brawl. During such moments, the non-players in the room (there were probably about 30-40 in one room), sleeping on two stories of plank beds, would wake up and, in confusion, try to understand what was going on. Sometimes, we could get four or five such loud

outbreaks during one night.

Under such conditions, the winter of 1942-1943 passed. In the spring of 1943, we were transferred to other places. In one of such transfers, I met my brother Sam, who was mobilized and incorporated into similar units that I served in. But we didn't stay together for too long. My new job in the summer of 1943 was to hand-operate four excavating shovels, each one the size of a cubic yard.

After several weeks of lifting the handles of the four containers, a tumor developed under my arm, which brought me to a military hospital. Since we worked for the airforce, the hospital had a large contingent of airmen wounded in action.

If one wants to learn what a war does to people, he could participate in it or see some of the results of it in a military hospital where the wounded are treated. The minute I entered the hospital, I went toward an operating room where I saw a human being with two legs cut off by shrapnel and the body left mostly unattended, jumping on the operating table in the agony of pain and convulsion.

In the big hall, there were probably one hundred beds pushed close together where severely wounded servicemen lay. The odor from their wounds was terrible. Many of them were barely screaming, some of them without legs or hands, severe wounds on their bodies, begging to be killed, so terrible was their pain and suffering.

After a few days, I got used to this horrible environment. My medical problem was insignificant compared to many others. In a few days, the physician looked at my tumor, decided that it was not serious, and promised that within three weeks I would be back in good shape. He was right; the medication he applied worked well and my tumor started shrinking.

Since my legs were healthy, the hospital assigned me to assist the personnel in serving

food to the wounded that had to stay in bed. This gave me a lot of exposure to wounded pilots and other servicemen, many of them officers. They used to tell stories about various combat situations. The most frequent were stories about the poor combat behavior of soldiers of different non-Russian so-called “national minorities.” Muslim minorities were the worst. They would assemble around a killed Muslim comrade in the middle of the battle and pray. They were extremely poorly disciplined and the Russian commanders of such units had a lot of trouble with them and usually could not accomplish the mission they were charged with.

The other experience in the hospital was my assignment as an adjutant to a military prosecutor who had the rank of captain. The hospital was an evacuation hospital, which means that it had to be located relatively close to the front lines. As the front moved, so did the hospital, hence the name “evacuation” hospital.

The captain prosecutor was sent to the hospital to investigate, to my mind, a rather trivial case of the disappearance of several gallons of wine that the hospital was supposed to use for severely wounded servicemen. My task was to stay at the door where the investigation took place and to run to call in some physician or administrator whenever the captain decided to confront the current interviewee with other witnesses. Since I was in the hospital for several weeks and moved around frequently, I knew a lot of the personnel or knew where to find them. The investigation always took place at night. The principal suspect was the director of the hospital, a man in his sixties. At about 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning, he would beg to end the interrogation for the day since he was very tired and didn't know what he was talking about. The captain would, most of the time, satisfy his request, be very polite to the hospital director, and ask me to accompany him on the way to his quarters.

My impression at the time was that the prosecutor really didn't have a strong case to

continue the investigation for so many days. But the captain was not in a hurry; the position he was in was very comfortable, and he clearly was not looking for other assignments, especially if it would require participation on the front-line battle. It is interesting that, even though he was accusing the hospital director of illegally diverting some hospital wine, the same captain would send me to a “friendly woman” who was serving in a regional military food supply warehouse with a whole list of food and drinks for his own use. But he was a nice man and very friendly to me. He allowed me to share the good food with him.

My goal, however, was not to stay in the hospital. I wanted to be sent to a regular unit of the Red Army in order to participate in the fight against the Germans. For this reason, when I entered the hospital, I made sure that they considered me a regular soldier, that is, I could simply say I was a Red Army soldier. My uniform, of course, testified to this veracity. At the hospital admissions desk, they didn’t make any attempt to check anything.

Upon my release from the hospital, I had to make sure that they sent me to a regular Red Army reserve unit, as they did with any wounded serviceman released from the hospital and being medically able to go back to a regular army unit. It worked perfectly on the hospital side.

When I arrived at the headquarters of the 8th Reserve Regiment of the Red Army located in the vicinity of Rzhev (the place was called Zapadnaya Dvina), a sergeant appeared and announced that they had a new order which said that people of Polish origin should be sent to the now-being-formed new Polish Army. Initially, we referred to this Polish army as the Wanda Wasilevska Army because she got permission from Stalin to form it.

I was not thinking too clearly and decided to admit that I was from Poland. My calculation was simple: Going to the Red Army, one may end up fighting the Japanese instead of the Germans, while the Polish Army would certainly be engaged on the western front against the

Germans. This calculation turned out to be right, but everything else was wrong. It was simply a trap, and I willingly fell into it. But, at the moment, I didn't know that and didn't realize that such a possibility existed.

For several weeks, I participated in regular training of the reserve unit. I was assigned to a *sapper* (engineering) unit, whose task was to organize landings through rivers, build temporary bridges across rivers, and lay mines or clear minefields before forward-moving units. This service was very dangerous in real combat situations, but the training didn't cause any serious suffering. It was still early fall, the weather was mild, and I even enjoyed being there. The food was much better than in the working battalions; the real soldiers were delightful companions, especially in the evenings after the daily training. I would often be sent to the kitchen to carry to the barrack the daily ration of bread, sugar, and hot meals. The procedure of dividing the bread and sugar was well established and very elaborate in order to be fair to everybody. There were never any complaints, so well was it done. After the soldiers had their meals, they would lay on their bunks, about 150-200 in all, and sing beautiful songs. Those were the most joyful and memorable moments of my service in the Red Army.

But, like most of the others in this reserve unit, this was not my goal. The fortunes of the Red Army vastly improved by that time and the specter of kicking out the Germans from the Soviet territory was now a real possibility. For me, that meant coming closer to my birthplace, my parents, and my relatives. And, with a little luck, I might even come back a victor and maybe save them.

After a few weeks of retraining, the reservists would be assigned to regular army units and leave the 8th Reserve Regiment. Unfortunately, I was not among them. Several more weeks passed and I was still practicing how to lay mines while others were sent out to fight. Suspicions

grew that something was wrong.

The sergeant who met us when we arrived at the regiment was also being held longer than the others, despite his good health and perfect credentials. What is the matter with him? There were a few more of those kinds of reservists being held without explanation.

Finally, the sergeant learned from friends in the regiment headquarters what the problem was. He came one night after consuming a larger than usual dose of vodka, screaming and swearing that he was a member of the Komsomol in good standing, always served his country, never deviated from the teaching and party line, and why do they discriminate against him? He wants to go and fight!

The problem was that they assembled five (so far) reservists who were either born in Poland or had Polish relatives and could not be trusted to be sent to regular Red Army units. The sergeant that lured me into that trap turned out to have a Polish grandmother. All of us, he learned, would be sent to Siberia to work in a coal mine. That was more than he could take. It was also disastrous for my plans. I was in a trap, together with the sergeant that induced me to admit my Polish origin. What an irony!

For a few more weeks, we believed that perhaps the information obtained from the headquarters was wrong or inaccurate or would be changed soon. There were good reasons for such thinking. The measures taken by the military may have been justified by the behavior of the so-called Anders Polish Army, which was formed in the Soviet Union in 1942 and left in the first half of 1943 through Iran instead of participating in the struggle against Germany. But that was several months earlier. Now, in the second half of 1943, Wanda Wasilewska, head of the ZPP (*Zwiazek Patriotow Polskich*--Association of Polish Patriots) convinced Stalin that the new Polish Army to be formed under the strict supervision of Polish communists could be trusted to

participate in the war against the fascists.¹ Hence, it must be that the instructions in the 8th Reserve Regiment of the Red Army were obsolete and would be changed at any time.

Our calculations, however, were wrong. We were soon informed that we would be sent to the new Polish Army and that a colonel would accompany us to the place of its formation, which we knew was somewhere not far from Moscow. The colonel would have all our documents and would be our commander on the way to the Polish Army. The sergeant didn't believe this story, and we were inclined to believe the sergeant this time.

We were given new Red-Army winter uniforms with woolen boots that strengthened our suspicion that these uniforms, especially the boots, were intended for a Siberian winter rather than service in the Polish Army where the uniforms, presumably, are Polish, not Soviet. The Polish Army never wore woolen boots, even in severe winters; we just weren't familiar with such footwear.

Finally, the colonel assembled us and we departed on our journey, ostensibly (yes, he was lying to the end) to the Polish Army. There were five of us, including the sergeant. We were given rations and were sent off on a comfortable journey, this time in the regular coach car, first to Moscow and then on to the Moscow-Vladivostok train. We were telling everybody we could that we were joining the Polish Army and we were traveling to the place of its formation. Not long after we got on the Moscow-Vladivostok train, people told us that they had met an officer of the Polish Army traveling on the same train in a nearby coach car. We immediately went to look for him and found him in a luxury compartment. We saluted him in the Russian way and he responded with the *czolem* (traditional Polish military greeting). He was very pleasant. We told him our

¹ Forming the Polish Army was, of course, a matter of trust as a force that would help Stalin rule Poland. This must have been the real reason he insisted on its formation and sparing use in the last stages of World War II.

story and the suspicions we had that we would not be released at the Polish Army's place of origin but rather would continue on to Siberia. He pretended that he didn't believe our suspicion. He told us that he was traveling all over the Soviet Union with a mission to free Poles from places of detention or work. However, in case we weren't turned over to the Polish Army, which was not far from where we held this discussion, he gave us the address of Wanda Wasilewska and said she would certainly make sure we would be sent to the proper place.

This visit with a real Polish officer and his promise to us raised our spirits, despite our belief that we were being taken against our will to Siberia. At least there was now hope that we could extricate ourselves, if needed.

Our suspicions turned out to be correct. We continued our journey to Siberia. The final destination turned out to be a coal mine in the Kuznetsk coal basin deep in Siberia (the station called Kandalaki in the Irkutsk oblast, Trest Molotov Ugol).

Upon arriving, the colonel, who carried a thick packet of documents about us, went to the offices of the coal mine management. I have always wondered what kind of documents he had on me. After all, my life was still short and nothing special had happened to merit putting it into such a thick dossier. Apparently, this was not the thinking of the Soviet authorities. It took them several months to assemble this documentation, and I surmised that they didn't leave any source of information about me untouched. Didn't they have better things to do during this horrible war? It must have been that they were building up a case that would justify keeping me in this coal mine for a long time.

Some of these thoughts must have crossed my mind while I was waiting several hours until the colonel came out of the office with a verdict: Abram Broner will stay here in the coal mine. Two or three of the co-travelers were told they would be sent to the Polish Army.

To me, this verdict was outrageous and I decided to act. First, I went to a young lieutenant working for the military commissar in town to appeal. I told him I was from Poland and should be sent to the Polish Army the same way the other guys were. His response was rude. "You are not Polish, you are Jewish and this is not a Jewish Army we are sending the other guys to." I responded, "But listen, I was born in Poland in Lodz, the part of Poland that has not been annexed to the Soviet Union; therefore, I should be treated as a citizen of Poland. If you want to check, please examine my language. I speak Polish just like those other people." My arguing did not convince him. His answer was the same: "Abram Mojsze Broner, the son of Israel. What are you talking about? You are Jewish and we will not send you to the Polish Army."

Then I decided to appeal to a higher authority. This time it was the commissar himself, a major in the Red Army. I reported myself according to the rules of the Red Army, which I still was in, and told him that I was young and I should go to the front where the fighting was going on because that was where the country needed me. As can be seen, I changed my argumentation, thinking that it sounded so patriotic and appropriate that he would not be able to reject my argument. "Yes," he said, "you are young, but the country needs you here. This is our second front" (meaning front line where the fighting goes on). "The country needs coal". "Yes, true", I retorted. "But here you can use older people, women, those who cannot serve in the military, but I belong in the fighting army." I thought that I got to him. He couldn't find any suitable answer. Then he turned to threats. "You immediately go to work. If you don't, we will arrest you. Now leave this room." My visit was over, and I was crushed.

I returned to the other people who were supposed to go back to the Polish Army. In the meantime, a few more people joined their group. Two were young men released from prison the same day. All five of them were very good friendly people. They asked what I had decided to do.

I had my decision ready. I even cannot remember at what moment I came to the conclusion. I said, "I am escaping. If you want me, I'll go with you." They asked, "But how?" I responded, "I will manage."

It is interesting how quickly a person in danger comes up with schemes on how to deal with it. My scheme was simple. I would go to the train station and get myself onto the train as a helper to the girl who served as the car conductor, among whose duties was to heat the car and prepare tea for the passengers. There was a tiny heating unit at the end of the car, which even had a door, and the heating compartment could be closed so that an unsophisticated controller (of tickets or travel documents) would not look into it. Clearly, my journey in the Moscow-Vladivostok train for several days allowed me to learn how the railway system works.

But how do I get the girl to let me serve as her illegal assistant? The answer came immediately. I approached her and said, "Look, you are getting a very limited ration of coal to heat your unit. I'll bring you a lot of additional coal if you allow me to travel to the next large city, Irkutsk." She agreed to the deal. Now I had to deliver. That was easy enough. There were hundreds of cars loaded with coal. All I had to do was jump on top of a few cars and take some coal so as not to be noticeable. The top of the coal cars was sprayed with white paint, so that any significant removal of coal could be detected. But I didn't worry about this since we were scheduled to leave the station soon. Besides, it was nighttime now and the white paint was not visible from below, even if somebody were to check it. My only worry was not being caught while removing the coal from the car or carrying it to the heating compartment. Well, you always have to count on a little luck. And on that night, I was lucky.

While traveling to the next city of Irkutsk, I had to start thinking about the other tricks I had to use to make my escape of more than three thousand kilometers succeed. The first leg of

my escape went according to plan. Yes, there were controls. The conductor was kind enough to close the door of the heating compartment right before the controllers approached it. She pretended that she was cleaning with a broom in the vicinity of the heating compartment. And it worked this time. Thanks to that brave Russian girl conductor whom I even didn't know by name.

In Irkutsk, the group of five Poles had to report to a city military office, where they were given rations for the next leg of the journey to Novosibirsk. A few more people were added to the group so that now there were seven legal and one illegal travelers. One of the new arrivals was a young Polish man from Warsaw, who was released from jail that same day. He was a very down-to-earth fellow. "Yes," he said, "you can travel with us but remember you have to contribute some food to the group. You should understand, the ration is not sufficient to share with you. We will share, but you must contribute." And he gave me a lesson in how to do this. "There are a lot of passengers traveling to prisons or army units or to relatives that have with them some food. All you have to do is to remove some of it from their possession. Simple?"

Yes, for him it was extremely simple. He knew how to do it; he had experience, he was jailed for stealing. But I have never stolen anything (please don't count the coal from the Kandalaki train station). However, I understood that, as much as I despised it, I must bring something. I had to keep with that group, which was the only means available to me to realize my broader goal.

On the way to Novosibirsk, where we had to change trains again, there were eight of us. A sergeant in our group was chosen as the leader. He had all the documents for the seven legal travelers. He located himself at one end of the car with a few soldiers from the group. At the other end of the car a few more were located. The rest, including myself, were in the middle of the car. It was a very natural arrangement since those were open compartments with no assigned

spaces. We took space where it was available. Quite often, I chose to sleep under the benches. There was always room there. Besides, maybe I could “share” some food with a fellow traveler. Most of the time, whenever military or civilian controllers came in, I was sleeping under the bench. People would tell the controller that a soldier was there, and his leader was at the end of the car. They never bothered me to get out from under the bench. They never tried to add up all the heads in the group to find out that there was one more than the documents indicated.

Somewhat more complicated was our adventure in Novosibirsk. We had to wait for a train for several hours, so the group decided to go out for sightseeing. I had an advantage over all the others since I lived in Novosibirsk a few years ago and could be a good tour guide for them. However, if we walked as a group, the danger was that, if a military patrol checked our documents, they might immediately discover that I was illegal. There was a way to avoid this danger—first by walking in small groups at some distance and, secondly, I had to watch who the patrol would stop first and disappear. Or, if they would stop me first, I had to know the names of my other fellow travelers that were not being stopped and tell the patrol the name of the other person. Luckily, we didn’t need to use this scheme.

On the train from Novosibirsk, we used the same procedure of location as described above. Moreover, I had already learned from previous experience when to expect a military control. Actually, it was the NKVD that did the controlling. They usually entered the train in large city stations. The control lasted several hours, and, by the time we reached the next stop (usually after some 200 kilometers), they would have finished and left the train. They would then get on a train going in the opposite direction.

But their return trip was not my worry. We had a few close calls though. One time I was sitting together with a general from the NKVD, who had been traveling with us the whole day.

We chatted about the difficult life of soldiers and our destination, the Polish Army. The control that came was very polite in the general's presence. I told them that I was going to the Polish Army (which was true) and that our leader had all the documents and was sitting at the end of the car. Fine. No problem.

Well, not exactly. The closer we came to our destination, the more I started worrying. I was almost sure that the Polish Army cooperated closely with Soviet authorities. Now technically, I was a deserter from the Red Army. The Polish authorities may not look favorably on a case of a deserter trying to enlist in the trustworthy Polish Army. In addition, what if they had the same policy as the Soviet authorities in the coalmine—considering themselves a purely Polish army to which Jews from Poland had no right to enter? All of these thoughts made me more nervous, the closer we got to the place called Divovo, about 150 kilometers southeast of Moscow.

We still had to change to a local train going to Divovo. On that train, most of the travelers were Poles headed for the Polish Army. My anxiety increased enormously. "Here comes the hour of truth," I thought. "Either I make it, or I'll be returned to the Soviet authorities and punished for my 'desertion'."

The train finally stopped. Through the windows we saw men in Polish uniforms. We got off the train and were immediately met by a junior officer who asked the newly arrived who was without legal documents. I looked around and saw a forest of hands raised. So I raised my hand, too, knowing I was safe.

In the Kosciuszko Army: Overrepresentation of Jews

It was late November 1943. I arrived at the place where the First Polish Corps of the so-called Kosciuszko Army had been organized. The Second Division had just left to join the Red Army in fighting the Nazis. The First Division participated in the battle near the town of Lenino. Preparations were under way to form the Third Division, named after the head of the 1863 uprising against the Tsarist Russia, which, at that time, occupied a large part of Poland.

People were arriving every day from all over the Soviet Union, some legally released from prisons, others just escaping from their places of work, and still others volunteering illegally in the Polish Army. A large group consisted of prisoners of war captured by the Red Army who considered themselves Poles but were living in Silesia. This part of southern Poland was claimed by the Germans to be theirs, but its inhabitants considered themselves “Silesians,” that is, not exactly Poles but certainly not Germans. The Germans treated them as *volksdeutsche* (almost German) and enlisted them in their army. The Silesian Poles didn’t want to fight on the German side and gave themselves up as soon as an opportunity arrived on the front. They were good, well-trained soldiers.

Finally, a sizeable group, especially among officers, was native Russians or Ukrainians transferred by Soviet authorities to serve as instructors in the Polish Army. Some of these officers had Polish ancestors.

I had to go through a significant adjustment. It was the first time in my life that I had to live and operate among Poles. It may sound strange now, but in pre-war Poland, with its strong anti-Semitic frolics, the Jewish community was quite isolated. By and large, Jews lived in areas heavily concentrated with Jewish people. More importantly, however, was the insulting language used to call Jewish people all kind of derogatory names, accusing them of killing their God, etc. There were frequent assaults on Jews, which sometimes turned into pogroms and massacres. Hence, whenever we could, we tried to avoid Christian Poles.

Now circumstances led me to share living quarters with Poles and, more importantly, often rely on their goodwill in situations that required camaraderie and even personal sacrifice. There were also cultural adjustments to be made. Every morning and evening at assembly (call), we would sing the *Rota* (a patriotic song with anti-German and religious overtones) and the *Boze cos Polske* (a strictly religious song with words like "God that bestowed kindness and protection...on Poland"). It is interesting that these songs were chosen, despite the highly visible influence of communists on the political direction of the Army. Naturally, it was done because these were traditional army songs and the leadership also wanted to preserve the appearances that we were a Polish army. It may be useful to recall here that, at that time in the Soviet Union, there was also a tendency to turn to religious references and appeals.

I didn't know the words to these songs and didn't particularly like them. Based on my Jewish background, I would rather sing *Mizmor shir lejom hashabot* (song of Sabbath). But then, I had to remind myself that this was not a Jewish army as the Soviet officer in Siberia had painfully admonished me about.

While on this subject, let me also mention that there was a sizeable, and I should say disproportionate, number of Jews in my Regiment. Many were among the officers as well. This is

understandable, since several hundred thousand Jews escaped from the German occupation to the Soviet side and many lived in the part of Poland that was occupied in 1939 by the Soviets. It is not known how many of them were able to escape the next German occupation in 1941, but it is known that the Soviets arrested the majority of those refugees in 1940 and sent them to camps in Siberia and the Far North. They had a terrible time there, but, in the end, they were saved and some could participate in the struggle against the Nazis.

I also had a little language problem. Before the war, my Polish language was good, even though at home we spoke mostly Yiddish. I attended an elementary school where the obligatory instruction in Polish was provided. My difficulty stemmed from using mostly Russian during the last three years, which meant my Polish had become a little rusty. But I overcame this easily within a few weeks. In any event, my Polish was much better than General Galicki's, my Division Commander. The General, who then was at the rank of Colonel, was the grandson of a participant of the 1863 Polish Uprising who was sent to Siberia. The leader of that uprising was Romuald Traugutt, sentenced to death by the Russian government. Colonel Galicki was transferred from the Red Army, and it certainly was a very appropriate assignment. His Polish language was initially not very good. However, he worked hard to improve it rapidly. We knew that he insisted that all officers transferred from the Red Army should speak only Polish during their official duties. Many, who were not of Polish origin, could not master the Polish language to the very end.

I was very happy that I was now much closer to reaching my true goal of getting involved directly in the struggle against the Nazis. I was part of a huge army that sooner or later would have to go to liberate Poland, thereby bringing freedom to my people as well. I didn't know then what happened to them and where they were.

What made me so happy was the fact that, for the first time in my life, I was given real weapons. I couldn't resist recalling my childhood on Wesola Street in Lodz. We kids used to like to play war as perhaps many kids all over the world did. At that time, we had fun but didn't realize how important, and I might say prophetic, those games were.

The atmosphere in the army was very good. To my knowledge, there were no anti-Semitic incidents of any kind. All of us were involved in training and preparation for the battles ahead. The officer corps was teaching camaraderie and cooperation among and within various units. The Army and the country we were going to fight for were supposedly democratic and the ideals of brotherhood and equality were supposed to be the guiding principle. Communists that joined the Army, among them many Polish communists of Jewish origin, propagated these ideals. Let me mention here, in passing, that the deputy commander of the 3rd Division was Lieutenant Edward Ochab, who several years later became the First Secretary of the Polish Workers Party and subsequently the President of Poland. Although faithful to the communist principles and teaching, he turned out to be a very decent person.

After a brief quarantine designed to prevent spreading any communicable disease, I was called to the commander of the 8th Regiment of the 3rd Division, which was being formed at that time. The audience was briefed. I reported according to the rules. Colonel Karasiewicz looked at me and said, "We will send you to the junior officers school." I responded, "Yes, sir," and that was it. The school was located in a barrack about 25-30 meters long and about 6 meters wide. Along both sides of the barrack were two levels of plank beds where we slept. There were two entries to the barrack, but only one was used most of the time. The other was only for emergencies. About two meters from the entry was a little steel oven where we could dry our

shoes and clothes after a day of exercises in the field. In one corner along the wall we put our weapons and gear.

Soon we started training. A few hours were devoted to learning military rules, weapons, and the like. That was mostly inside. Field tactics and maneuvers were done outside. It was winter (February-March of 1944). Practicing defense was the most hated exercise. We had to dig in frozen soil and snow and sit there, freezing, for several hours. By the end, we begged the commander to allow us to counter-attack. During the counter-attack, we warmed our legs and hands and felt much better.

Getting up in the morning was a real nightmare. There were about one hundred alumni in that large barrack. The morning assembly had to be accomplished within two or three minutes, during which time we had to get up from our place where we slept, dress (especially cumbersome were the foot clouts that had to be rolled over and fastened to the legs), grab the weapon, and run out through the one narrow door and stay in proper format. If we couldn't accomplish all of this in the allotted time, the school commander (lieutenant Mozarowski) would turn us back, order us to go back to sleep and again call "rouse" and repeat the same procedure. After a few such exercises, he would allow the entire company to remain assembled but would punish the late-comers by ordering them to run around the barrack 20-30 times. He would then explain how he loved us but wanted to turn us into good soldiers and good instructors so that when we entered the real battle with the enemy, we would be well prepared. We thought he was right. He also quite often ordered night alarms during which we had to get up fast and leave the barracks with all our weapons and belongings, so that nothing would be left to the enemy. A few times, such night alarms were followed by forced marches to some place 5 or 10 kilometers away.

I didn't have any problems with that training, although I can't say that I enjoyed it. The only problem I had was hiding the woolen boots that I brought from the Red Army. I considered them my main treasure and I didn't want to lose them. Initially, I hid them behind my pillow. But I knew that sooner or later they would be discovered and would be taken away from me. So I decided to sell them to local people. A few locals were sometimes standing not far from our camp selling *pierogi* or potatoes. One day, I took my boots to barter. I got a kettle of potatoes (about 5 pounds) in exchange for my boots. Not a good price, but the best I could get. I was happy that I didn't have to worry about losing my treasure anymore.

After graduating the ten-week course for junior officers, I was awarded the rank of corporal and was appointed deputy commander of the 1st platoon of the 7th company. The officer corps, including junior officers, was preoccupied for a few more weeks with training the recruits (some of them over 50 years old), who had arrived from all corners of the Soviet Union.

By late March of 1944, the 3rd Division was preparing to take the Oath. A few weeks of preparation, mainly parade marching, preceded the actual ceremony. The first date was canceled after several German planes were seen cruising above the field where the Division was assembling. On March 26, the Division was sworn in. Everybody repeated the solemn words of the Oath, after which there were festive dinners. A few weeks later, we started preparations to leave our current location of Sielce for a destination closer to the Soviet-Polish border.

In the meantime, I was sent to an additional training course, this time for political officers. After graduating from that course, I was advanced to the rank of *plutonowy* (N.C. officer rank).

We prepared to move closer to the front, which at that time already stretched into the old territories of eastern, pre-war Poland. The next phase of training was approaching the train station and the fast, efficient loading and unloading of materials, weapons, and combat units. Finally, we

embarked for Poland to take part in the struggle for freedom against the German occupiers. The journey by train to the front near the old Polish-Soviet border lasted several weeks. A few times, German planes bombarded us. One serious incident occurred near Kiev. Our route went through the cities of Riazan, Kursk, Bielgorod, Kharkov, Poltava, and Kiev toward Rowne and the little train station of Kiwerce. This station was about 20 kilometers from the front line and 45 kilometers from the newly designated border between the Soviet Union and Poland. This newly designated frontier incorporated a large part of pre-war Poland into the Soviet Union. Of course, we knew for some time about these political changes and tried to justify them by pointing out that Poland would regain the so-called historical right to German territories in the west. The other argument was that, in the territories annexed by the USSR, the people were mainly of Ukrainian or Belorussian extraction and should be united with their brethren in the adjacent Soviet Republics. This was a very controversial issue. But for us, at that time, it was secondary to our forthcoming struggle against the Nazis. After reaching our destination in Kiwerce, we expected to join the Red Army at any time in the fight against the Germans. But we still had to wait another two months, during which time we went through extensive training, including the firing of real ammunition.

War till Victory

Finally the day arrived. It was July 15, 1944. We left our encampment and, for some strange reason, we incinerated our makeshift bunkers where we had lived for the last three months. The euphoria was high. Finally, we were in it for good. Each day, the marching brought us closer to the real action. How did we know it? Nobody actually told us what precisely was going on. We didn't have to be told; we heard it. The resonance of the huge artillery "preparation" for the offensive was initially mute or rather inarticulate. One could not clearly distinguish particular discharges but heard a general, almost uninterrupted roar. It was rather apocalyptic and scary because we didn't know whose artillery was so active and, therefore, what would await us when we came closer to it. And closer to it we came with each hour of our advance. As we approached, we could hear more clearly the sounds of artillery shells exploding. When a huge thunderstorm is approaching from far away, we hear similar, initially inarticulate and subsequently more distinct and dangerous rumbling.

Somehow one can hide from a thunderstorm. One rule I've learned is not to stand behind a tree. But, in this case, it was clear that, when we came closer to the storm, we wouldn't be able to hide. We would have to plunge into the middle of the storm and, if the enemy were sending these fireballs, they would cause havoc."

It soon became clear to the lower commanding officers and the soldiers as well that our side was doing the shelling. These first feelings of entering a big battle, despite our understanding

that we were the offensive army, were not necessarily full of joy and bravura. The soldier, who had never been in a real battle, didn't know what kind of hell it was. And we had no doubt that it must be hell. Thinking of the abyss that we were about to enter was still scary since we understood that, sooner or later, the Germans would respond in kind.

But they didn't! After a few more days of marching, we came close to the Bug River, the new frontier of the "new democratic" Poland. In a sense, it was rather a disappointment, since there was no fight. Or, if there was some fighting, the Red Army met it with its overwhelming fire power. On our march, we were met by tank units, which were returning from the front line and were kidding us, the infantry, for our slowness. We thought we were doing our best, and we certainly did.

We reached a rather narrow crossing on the Bug River, where a hastily erected bridge marked the point where we, the Polish Army, was going to enter the new, democratic Poland. Along the bridge, on both sides, military and political dignitaries from Poland and the Soviet Union were greeting the "heroic" Polish Army, which was about to enter the final stage of liberating Poland. At that time, it looked to me that some cheating was going on here. The Red Army units prepared this show for us and all we had to do was march across that little bridge and that was it. What a disappointment! We didn't do anything serious to deserve the title of a liberating army.

The next day, after a brief rest, we continued our movement forward, not meeting any resistance. The Germans clearly were on the run. They decided to organize their defense on the Vistula River closer to Warsaw. Good for us "liberators." Our morale was high. We were excited, and it was so easy. But not for long. In the meantime, we enjoyed tremendously the enthusiastic and, at times, suspicious greetings from the liberated Polish population.

Since I was, at the time, a platoon commander, actually playing the role of a deputy company commander, I could often run ahead of the main marching column. That gave me the opportunity to be among the first liberators of particular villages and towns. Quite often, we had to convince the peasants that greeted us that we actually were the Polish Army. We had to speak in Polish, which was not a problem for most of us. Many times we had to show them the eagles on our hats to assure them that we were not the Red Army. The trouble was that our eagle was not exactly the one they remembered from pre-war times. Ours was a prolonged eagle without the crown on its head as was the pre-war one. Nevertheless, most of the time, we were able to convince them.

Over the next several weeks, we marched toward Warsaw. Naively, we thought that our final strategic goal was to take Warsaw, the capital of Poland, and the war would be over for us. It is difficult to explain why we were thinking that way, except to recall that a large part of the propaganda was appealing to the Polish soldiers to retake Warsaw from the Germans as our major objective.

The terrain approaching Warsaw from the east was very sandy. Marching in narrow paths within forests was extremely difficult. Often we followed artillery units, which cut very deep ruts. Even regular carts, which were carrying supplies or our kitchens, could carve deep trails, which were difficult for the infantry to follow. But we didn't mind because our aim was to take Warsaw from the Germans.

As it turned out, taking Warsaw was almost half a year away. In the meantime, we had to overcome significant resistance and suffer many thousands of casualties. Our real first meeting with the enemy was in the area of the Pilica River (Przyczulek Warecko-Magnuszewski), located approximately 50-60 kilometers southwest of Warsaw. The Soviet Army was holding the first line

of defense in that area. It meant that the offensive was halted there and we had to dig in. We arrived at the place where our units were supposed to take up the second and third lines of defense, which for precautionary reasons, should have been done at night. The Germans were about 2-3 kilometers away on the other side of the river. My platoon commander, Lieutenant Matejko, received precise coordinates and started assigning places where each soldier should dig his trench. He did it in accordance with the rules of the military code. He measured precisely the distance between each trench and it took him considerable time to finish this “important” task. Finally, around 3 or 4 o’clock in the morning, each soldier knew exactly where to dig. We had small personal spades to use for digging. By dawn, we were able to dig very shallow dens. The commander started yelling for us to stop digging and to hide immediately.

Luckily, so we thought, the fields were recently harvested and plenty of wheat sheaves were available. We put the sheaves on top of our little trenches, where we were supposed to stay until the next night. Since the order in which we put the sheaves was different from the order peasants put them in, German reconnaissance planes had a very easy task of discovering our presence. They didn’t shower us with bombs. But they threw a few to let us know that they had seen us. So much for the extra precaution of our platoon commander! Ironically, the Soviet Army was not so meticulous in obeying the military code. The same morning when we were sitting behind the sheaves, we saw two figures approach our lines from behind and move toward the front line. When they came closer, we were surprised to see two Soviet soldiers “spinning” the communication lines (the field telephone) in full view of the enemy.

An even more striking difference between the Soviet soldiers’ behavior and our own on the front line was revealed few days later, when we moved to the first line of defense to release the Soviet units. We moved in position at night, of course. The Soviet division was supposed to

turn over to us all the intelligence they had gathered from observations over the last few weeks. They did a good job on that. Each position we took over was manned during the first night by units of both armies. They showed us exactly where the enemy located the light and heavy machine guns, artillery pieces, command posts, etc. The next night, while the Soviet and Polish units were still in the trenches, we were entirely responsible for the defense. The Soviet soldiers felt much relieved and free. That gave them time for a little foray into the German trenches. They went without firearms, only knives and hand grenades. Maybe officially they went for a “tongue,” which meant a live enemy prisoner that could provide information about their units, armaments, and plans. The real aim of the escapade was to get some good food and liquor, of which they knew the Germans had plenty.

The operation was conceived of and executed brilliantly. A few of our positions knew of their foray in order to provide cover in case of emergency but mainly to let them out and back quietly. A group of six or seven soldiers departed at about midnight. They knew exactly which bunker the officers occupied. There they expected to find plenty of the sought after spoils and maybe also a sleeping officer that would know a lot. Next, they had to know how the guards were located and were moving around. With that knowledge clearly in their mind, they had to approach the place quietly, jump into the bunker, grab that was there, gag him, and bring him out fast while the others grabbed the food and liquor. If necessary, they could use any quiet means to remove any unforeseen danger and retreat as fast as possible. The night I was there, it worked out without a hitch. I have learned that this was not the first such attack by this unit in that place. The next night, they left, and, for the first time, we were confronting the enemy at a distance of about 300-400 meters across the little Pilica River.

After a month of small skirmishes in that area, the Soviet Army replaced our unit. By that time, we were much more experienced soldiers.

Although the Warsaw appraising started on August 1, 1944, we were directed toward Warsaw in the middle of September. Other units of the Polish Army, together with Soviet units, undertook the task of regaining the eastern outskirts of Warsaw (Grochow, Praga). It looked like the two armies were ready to take Warsaw too but, for political reasons, stopped short of entering the city where an appraising was being directed by the underground subordinated to the exiled Polish government in London. This was not that clear at the time. In mid-September, a few Polish divisions were directed toward the suburbs of the capital with an order to organize assistance for the fighters in Warsaw.

On the way to the Warsaw suburbs, we heard and witnessed heavy fighting. Our unit was not participating in those battles but was given the task of forcing the Vistula River and land in downtown Warsaw where the insurrection took place. We marched into Grochow, a suburb of Warsaw about 3 kilometers from the Vistula. The Poniatowski Bridge, although partly destroyed, was now in front of me, the same bridge that my brother Sam and I crossed in 1939 on our way to the Soviet Union. Now I had the task and honor of taking the bridge back from the Germans and to liberate the people of Warsaw.

Unfortunately, events of a war do not happen so simply. We were spread out in private quarters, together with the civilian population remaining in or returning to Grochow. After a few days of preparations, we embarked on our approach toward Warsaw. The enthusiastic population who wished us success in liberating Warsaw accompanied us for a few kilometers. When we came close to the bridge and the surrounding buildings, we had to ask the civilians to return to their

homes because we now were in a very dangerous zone, where air and artillery fire could cause many casualties.

We turned left to Saska Kepa and dispersed in surrounding buildings. Heavy artillery fire started almost immediately after our arrival. A few planes tried to penetrate our side of the river but were shot down immediately as they showed up on the horizon. Although the combined enemy fire was not causing serious casualties, advancing under those conditions could have been too costly. We got the orders to abandon our attempt to force the river and to return to our quarters in Grochow. We were disappointed and somewhat dispirited. However, we were sure that we would try again.

In a few more days, we did try one more time. My unit was this time advancing to the right of the Poniatowski Bridge on an undeveloped field near the Kierbedzia Bridge. (This place is now the Stadion Dziesięciolecia, a sports stadium.) We were easily detected by the Germans and were met by a furious barrage of artillery fire that we could not withstand. We retreated very fast, running thorough the field to get out of the fire zone. There were losses.

To this day, it is not clear to me why we were approaching those positions in daylight in clearly visible marching columns. Was it deliberate? Our next attempt was carried out at night and this time we reached the Vistula bank undetected and were seriously getting at the task of landing on the other side of the river.

Almost all the companies of our 8th Regiment of the 3rd Division got into boats with as many light arms as possible and under a smoke screen cover. Was the smokescreen an indication of where the units were located? The Germans on the other side of the river knew where the floating boats were and met them with a heavy barrage of fire. There were heavy casualties. Only small units managed to reach the left bank of the Vistula, where the Polish combatants were

supposed to hold positions. Since this operation was considerably delayed from the time the Warsaw combatants indicated their positions, the Germans had enough time to drive them out. Hence, the small army units that managed to reach the left bank of the river had to fight the Germans instead of being met by friendly forces. The whole operation, both on its way to the river and on its left bank, was a colossal failure. Most of the participating units were destroyed.

Only a few soldiers managed to survive in areas between the bridge columns where they hid and tried to swim back during the next few nights. According to official accounts, 485 soldiers from our regiment were killed in that operation. Other units of the 3rd and 2nd infantry divisions suffered many more casualties.

There are many ways one can survive the horrors of war. Most are due to simple luck. In this instance, I was the lucky one. What happened was that, only the 7th Company of the entire 8th Regiment (there were nine companies and several special units in an infantry regiment) was assigned to remain on the right bank of the river with the task of assisting in loading heavy artillery onto the boats. The operation was called off before the artillery tried to force the river. Our next and last attempt to assist the Warsaw Appraising failed miserably. Warsaw was burning; the city was losing its struggle for liberation.

Early the next morning after that failed operation, while I was still on the right bank of the Vistula River, a group of high-ranking Soviet officers (I thought that Marshal Konstanty Rokosowski was among them) passed by, arguing loudly, "We could have given them artillery support." Since I knew the Russian language very well, I understood at that time (and still think) that they were implying that the Polish divisions that launched the Vistula operation acted on their own, without coordinating with the Red Army command. It seemed implausible to me (then, and even more so now) that the Soviet command didn't know what was going on in such an important

part of the front. After all, two Polish Divisions approached the Vistula River and the Front Commander didn't detect them? I think that the high Soviet officers were staging a sideshow to deflect their co-responsibility for the failed operation.

This defeat had enormous consequences for the Jewish people who were left. At that time, there were still chances to save several thousand Jews in the Ghetto of Lodz and other places in southern and western Poland. Had we taken Warsaw, there was a good chance of continuing the offensive further west. Obviously, it had to be the will of the Soviet command to pursue it together with the Polish Army.

I thought that I had lost a great opportunity to liberate my people. The irony of history was that I was ready to risk my life to help the Warsaw Uprising succeed, while the Polish underground that had initiated it was standing by while the Jewish Uprising in Warsaw a year earlier was being crushed by the Nazis.

After recovering from the Vistula disaster a few weeks later, we returned to the river once more, this time in a defensive posture. Along the right bank of the Vistula, to the north of Warsaw, the river has a bulwark, which we used to arrange our defensive positions. We built bunkers, observation and firing points, and trenches along the bulwark.

It was a dream position for defense. Elevated above the ground and protected by the river in front, we could sit there forever. Obviously, this was not our goal. We wanted to be there as short a time as possible and resume our effort to liberate Warsaw. As it turned out, we spent more than two months there, and we even managed to have some fun during the war. While sitting in the makeshift observation point, we used the newly acquired tracing bullets to shoot the enemy positions and watch the bullets bounce back into the air when they hit some hard object. But most of the fun focused on our ability to shoot at them with relative impunity. My favorite game was

empty onto the top of the bulwark a kettle of barrel partridge, which we received daily.

Overnight, the partridge froze (it was now November -December) and it looked to the Germans like a soldier's head. Their sharpshooters, obviously, considered this an opportune target to aim at. We were sitting deep in the bunkers and watching the German tracing bullets bouncing back when they hit the grits. It was not an entirely safe game, but it was fun and it reflected our war experience and disregard for the enemy.

An even riskier, but more meaningful, game was the 1945 New Year's celebration. At exactly midnight on December 31, we started a shooting spectacle with all the firing power at our disposal. Heavy and light artillery, heavy and light machine guns, individual rifles—everything and everyone participated in more than an hour of firing, letting the Germans know that the New Year would be our year of victory and the end of the war.

The Germans were hiding on their side of the river, probably surprised by our vicious attack and wondering whether this was not the beginning of the winter offensive, which they knew always came at this time of year. Not until about 3 o'clock in the morning did they decide to respond in kind, shooting toward our side. Luckily, we were dug in safely and did not suffer any casualties.

There were several attempts by our reconnaissance to capture prisoners. In most cases, special units were trained to carry out such operations. There were also "penal companies," which consisted of soldiers punished for serious offenses. Those companies were usually given the most dangerous tasks of reconnaissance. Our platoon sometimes received orders to go down the river and measure the thickness of the ice. Naturally, such orders were given in December when the river started freezing and when the commanders needed information about the conditions for crossing the Vistula during the upcoming winter offensive.

Going down the river was dangerous because of the systematic rocket firing by the Germans to illuminate the terrain (flash bombs). They had the habit of firing those rockets to make sure that we didn't fall asleep during the night. More seriously, they, of course, were watching to see whether somebody was approaching them in the darkness.

The danger was also created by nature itself. We had to wade out into the river as far as possible and retrieve pieces of ice that we cut out there. It was easy to step too far, causing the ice to break and giving the soldier a really cold shower. The trick we used to avoid such bad luck was to bind everyone together with a strong rope and approach the river in a vertical line. In case the ice broke under the feet of the soldier in front, everyone behind him would be able to hold him and pull him out of the water. It was dangerous but also fun to go on such missions, especially if we accomplished them unnoticed.

We stayed in that defensive position on the Vistula bulwark until January 6, 1945. During the day, when our unit had retreated and had been replaced by other Polish brigades, a fatal bullet killed a soldier that had just taken up the position. What bad luck!

We had to get a few days of rest and prepare for the big battle for Warsaw. We didn't have to wait too long. On January 12, 1945, we set out toward the south. We marched only at night, and with extreme caution—no smoking, campfires, or loud talking. The reason was we were marching along the Vistula River on its right bank while the Germans were observing everything from the other side. The more unexpected our appearance, the better our chances of success. We had learned our lessons. Besides, we were now part of a very serious offensive that ultimately was designed to finish the war, unlike our timid attempts to come to the rescue of the Warsaw Appraising.

It was freezing. On the night of January 17, the marching was extremely slow. The first units of our army were approaching the Vistula in the vicinity of Gora Kalwaria, where we had to cross the river. The ice was very thick here, so the infantry had no problem crossing. The concern was about artillery and other heavy equipment and munitions. Would the ice hold? In most instances, it did. But this whole operation had to be carried out under the threat of enemy fire. So the going was slow, and we were freezing. However, we also knew that this was the decisive battle for us. For me personally, it was the chance to liberate my people and return home. I was less than 130 kilometers from Lodz.

By the early morning of January 17, 1945, we were on the other side of the river, entering the town of Gora Kalwaria, which was on fire. I was ecstatic. Never in my life had I participated in such a direct liberation of a town known to me, at least, by name. I was running wild, I remember, uphill from the river. No people. The enemy must have left just a little while ago. Good feeling! I knew Gora Kalwaria before the war as the seat of the Gerer Rabbi, one of the two giant rabbis of my time. The other was the Alexanderer Rabbi (a small town not far from Lodz). Both of these famous rabbis had an enormous following. But both camps of followers were in fierce competition, arguing whose rabbi was more learned, wiser, better at judging disputes, and giving good advice. Above all, which one was the holiest. Although I was not a follower of either (my favorite was the Tomaszower Rabbi, whom I knew personally), I had great respect and admiration for both.

And now I was participating in the liberation of this famous place. After the difficult night of January 17, we could have expected that we would be given some time to rest before moving forward. Not this time. The orders were to press ahead as fast as possible. And so we continued advancing all day. Along the way, we entered several Warsaw suburbs, such as Piaseczno, Pyry,

and Sluzewiec, where the population greeted us enthusiastically. In addition to flowers and kisses, we were flooded with moonshine made of wheat, potatoes, sugar, and, most frequently, beet. The latter didn't taste good, but we didn't mind. By late evening, we entered Mokotow, the southern part of Warsaw proper. No big crowds greeted us. The city was rather empty, deserted. We didn't have difficulty finding nice, empty apartments in the remaining buildings. For the first time in many months, we slept on beautiful mattresses in civilized conditions.

Thus, our main goal of the war, liberating Warsaw, had been accomplished! The majority of our servicemen naively thought that, for us, the war is almost over. In reality, we had to get up early the next morning and prepare ourselves to continue the offensive. So much for sleeping on good mattresses! During the day of the 18th, we marched through the main streets of Warsaw: Aleje Jerozolimskie and Marszalkowska. Actually, these were no longer streets but rather narrow lines cleared from pieces of mortar, bricks, and other debris remaining from destroyed buildings. On both sides of those lines were piles of debris, some not yet cleared of mines the enemy left for us. Whoever tried to step outside the cleared paths was endangering himself and his comrades. There were some casualties.

Personally I was not disappointed that we had to continue advancing since this brought me closer to my home, the city of Lodz, which was now only 130 kilometers to the southwest. I fervently hoped that I would find my people there and fulfill my obligation to them. During the day, we made good progress in our advance to the west. However, instead of turning more toward the south, as I expected, my division was ordered to turn northwest, toward the town of Sochaczew. I was seriously considering leaving my company and joining some other units that were moving southwest. However, friends advised me not to do that, since it might be considered desertion. I was so close to my home and terribly disappointed. It's not difficult to imagine how

unhappy I was. All these years, I was hoping that I would be able to liberate them, to show my true feeling to them—not in words but in deeds. In spite of my feelings, I couldn't decide against military discipline. The consequences of such disobedience could have been tragic. Several times I had witnessed the punishment of deserters in the Polish Army by execution squads.

We moved toward Sochaczew and had a terrible time crossing the Bzura River. There was no bridge and many Soviet and Polish units were trying to cross on the ice, which was a very thin sheet. We had to help the artillery pushing their canons through the broken ice. There were tremendous delays and a huge concentration of military personnel and equipment.

Our next encounter with the enemy took place a few days later near the city of Bydgoszcz. Our regiment was named the Bydgoszcz Regiment in recognition of our important role in its liberation. I don't recall any serious fighting for the city itself, which was probably carried out by other battalions or regiments. But the spoils were important. Jan Sakowicz, the company commander, decided to load a motorcycle on one of our carts. Of more immediate use was a barrel of beer we picked up in the city brewery. The scene in the basement of the brewery was unforgettable. Hundreds of broken liquor bottles, probably thousands of cases of beer, and hundreds of Polish and Soviet soldiers walking through a floating stream of alcohol, the fumes of which could make one drunk. Everybody was trying to pick out unbroken containers of alcohol.

The same afternoon, we got orders to move on in pursuit of the fleeing Germans. Our march was extremely fast. In each village on the northern side of Bydgoszcz, we asked local people whether they had seen the Germans and in which direction they were retreating. In each case, the answer was positive and indicated that the Germans had just left. The farther away from the city, the shorter the time since the Germans had just left. We knew that very soon we would

catch up with them. And pretty soon we did. They fired on us from different directions. And we were ready and eager to get our hands on them. But this was easier said than done.

We spread out in the field, which was snow covered and frozen. The best we could do was erect a little shield of snow in front of our heads. Not much of a defense! And we could fire in their direction, which we did. But we had to move ahead and eject them from the village Magdalenka, where we were supposed to stay overnight. This went very slowly. Each time we raised our heads and tried to move, we were met with heavy fire. We lay down again in the icy snow. After a few hours, our hands were frozen to such a degree that we could not load our automatic weapons. The situation became desperate. Nevertheless, occasionally some small units moved a little ahead. At about two o'clock in the morning, we moved close to a barn from which the Germans were firing at us. Someone managed to toss a hand grenade, setting the building on fire. That was the signal that encouraged us to launch a final attack. We stormed the village. I knew that, in a direct fight with the Germans, we won. Orders were given to rest for the remainder of the night. But before we dispersed into the village houses, we captured two military trucks loaded with boxes of chocolate. We picked out a few boxes of the sweet stuff, took out the barrel of beer that we got in Bydgoszcz, and celebrated our victory with the local people. Not much sleeping that night. Early the next morning, we continued our advance.

Many columns were moving in the snow-covered terrain the next day. Close to us was a line of Soviet infantry. At one point, a few figures with raised hands appeared in the field. We ran to them. They were German soldiers from the last mobilization of older people (about 50 years old). They didn't want to fight anymore and decided to give themselves up. Nice, I liked that! When we were leading the prisoners to turn them over to the staff command, a Soviet soldier approached them from behind and shot them one by one. I took a "mauser" rifle from one of them

because I wanted to have such a nice weapon at my disposal. A Soviet soldier asked me to show it to him. He took it and smashed it on a nearby tree, breaking it in half. No bad feeling. We continued to fight the same war, albeit by somewhat different means.

After a few more days, we crossed into former German territory (before 1939). We took Pila (Schneidemuhl), Walcz, and Polczyn Zdroj (Bad Poltzin)—all German cities—which, from then on, would be incorporated into the New Poland.

While fighting for these places, we had a bit of trouble. The Soviet and Polish armies continued their fast offensive by cutting the main German forces into pieces and leaving some pockets to be mopped up by units from the second lines. In one such operation, we met a large concentration of German units who were defending the lines approaching the northern port city of Kolobrzeg and Berlin to the southwest. Our division had to cross the Gwda River on February 1, 1945. Things didn't go well for us. At some point, the Germans were even counter-attacking. I recall a large concentration of our units and a scary situation. We knew that, in a few hours, we had to go on the offensive, and I felt a little weak and scared. Maybe it was because the Germans were attacking us, a situation we had not been used to in the last several months. So, this situation caused me to be apprehensive. We still had some liquor. I took a large gulp of vodka to feel stronger and prepared for the worst. At one point in the battle, instead of our going forward, we got orders to retreat from the riverbank, which we had held for some time. The river was narrow, about 50 meters wide. My platoon was among a few units of the rear guard that was supposed to hold the Germans as long as possible, while our main force withdrew. I saw the Germans coming to the river on the other side and constantly firing at us. We fired at them as well, man to man. It was a fierce battle. What is amazing about this episode is that a complete change took place inside me: Instead of fear, I felt some kind of joy that I was firing directly at them. Wasn't that my inner

dream all those years—to be able to kill them instead of just spitting at them as I did in the first month of the occupation in 1939?

That sudden change from fear to bravura is the stuff that explains many stories of heroic behavior among ordinary soldiers. One does not take making the decision to become a hero or risk life lightly. No, every soldier wants to remain alive and hit the enemy. It is the dynamics of a battle and the circumstance in which each soldier finds himself that generates the kind of action that may be called heroism but which I will call absence of fear and a strong desire to hit your enemy while you have the opportunity. If there was such an opportunity during my war with the Germans, this was it. In my case, I don't stress heroism; rather, the change from fear to bravura and, finally, joy. Ultimately, we withstood the pressure, retained our position, and subsequently broke the German resistance. We could advance farther north.

Between February and early April, two events occurred that are worth mentioning. One of my company's missions was to gather together German prisoners of war in the area near the Oder River, where we were now stationed, and deliver them to the city of Poznan, located about 100-plus kilometers to the east. There they would be turned over to Soviet military authorities and subsequently sent as prisoners of war to the Soviet Union. Nothing during all the war years gave me greater pleasure than escorting hundreds of German prisoners. Imagine, that little boy from Wesola Street would now be leading a huge line of the *Herrenvolk* (nation of masters) prisoners, humiliated and subordinated to my command! I can't resist recalling how, at the beginning of the occupation, they arrogantly taught everybody how to cross the street on the turn of their policeman. Now I was insisting that they stay four in a row, and they couldn't get it right for a long time. They impressed me as being quite dumb. O heavens! Why didn't my parents get the

opportunity to see their little boy leading hundreds of their oppressors to their deserved punishment? That punishment was extremely mild in comparison to their crimes.

Another important event for me personally was an incident with a priest in Bad Poltzin. One evening, I was on patrol in the city, since we were the city garrison at that time. When I was passing the buildings of the evangelical church, I heard dramatic screaming and calls for help. I rushed inside to find the following scene: A completely drunk Soviet soldier holding people at gunpoint, shouting at them to give him cigarettes. The priest, his wife, and some other people were all on their knees, begging this soldier to let them go free because they didn't have any cigarettes. Obviously, the soldier didn't understand what they were telling him in German and, even in Russian, he wasn't able to comprehend much since he was dead drunk. It took me a while to convince the soldier that these people were not dealing with cigarettes and that he should let them go, or better yet, that he should leave the premises. As a result of my strong persuasion in Russian, he did leave. Afterwards, all the people who were, until now, on their knees, got up, ran over to me, and started hugging me, kissing my hands, and thanking me for rescuing them from a certain death. That's how they saw their situation a while ago, judging probably from the behavior of German soldiers in similar situations.

I couldn't resist telling the priest that I was Jewish and was happy to get them out of danger. Hearing this, the priest suddenly disappeared and returned after a few minutes with a Hebrew book (the Old Testament) and started reading to me in Hebrew and explaining the text. He must have been surprised that such a young serviceman knew German, Russian, and Hebrew as well. Certainly, I was pleased with and impressed by his gesture. Since then, we became good friends. I visited the priest as often as I could and had many interesting conversations with him. Even after all the barbarism of the Germans, I couldn't hate civilian Germans.

After a few weeks, we had to leave Bad-Poltzin to continue the war with the other Germans. We were now concentrated along the Oder River. The general offensive had stopped for a short period of consolidation and preparation for the final move toward Berlin and maybe the last battle of the war. Marshal Zhukov was now the General Commander of the entire front. I remember a leaflet issued in his name calling for the troops to prepare for the decisive battle. Unfortunately, I fell ill and had to go to a hospital. After my release, I was sent to a reserve unit in Warsaw, which I didn't want to join and asked to be sent back to my original company. On the way back to Germany, I had the opportunity to visit my hometown again.

It was now May 8, 1945. While I was in Lodz, the capitulation of the Germans was announced and the war was over. I had the chance to participate in the big victory rally on Plac Wolnosci, the same place where I had joined the rather sad rally in 1939 when war was first declared. Both proclamations were made from the balcony of the municipal building on Plac Wolnosci. In 1939, the city's President was Jan Kwapinski, a socialist who became Prime Minister of the Polish government in exile in London. In 1945, the city's President was Kazimierz Mijal, a communist. So this is what had happened in my city during my absence. We had moved from Polish socialism to German fascism to Polish communism. That metamorphosis had enormous consequences for the lives of many people, including my own.

Meanwhile, I returned to my company via the liberated Berlin. Our regiment was located northwest of Berlin. It would be an understatement if I were to say that I enjoyed standing on the streets of Berlin, the city from whence all that evil emanated. How many times had we repeated the slogan, "Forward to Berlin," which was displayed everywhere we moved. Now, I had finally made it here, the Nazi enemy had been crushed, and our victory complete.

After a few weeks, we started preparing ourselves for the return trip to Poland. Normally, such a return would have been a very happy and peaceful one. But these were not peaceful times in Poland. The struggle between the old and new was far from settled. As it turned out, this was a period in my military service that was, in many respects, worse than the war.

By the end of May we started our journey back to Poland, this time not on foot but in cattle wagons by train. We had only short periods of time when the train stopped that we could get off and mingle with civilians at the station. Invariably, on such occasions, we visited the station buffet and ordered some ordinary food. In most cases, the railroad workers would offer the soldiers a drink and organize an impromptu welcoming rally, greeting the victorious Polish Army. On one such occasion, I drank too much vodka, returned to the railroad car, and passed out where two cars were joined together. I don't remember anything else that happened to me after that. Naturally, my colleagues brought me inside the car. Generally, I don't have a tendency to drink too much. But that time, as a victorious soldier, I couldn't refuse the multiple drinks offered to me by the railroad workers.

We reached Lublin and continued on foot toward Krasnik. On the way we were ordered for a night sleep in Majdanek- the empty barracks from the infamous German concentration camp. Many hundreds of thousand of Jewish people perished in that place- mainly in the crematorium. Who knows maybe this was the place where my family was killed? How could they be so insensitive to the many Jewish soldiers, whose parents may have died there too? I know I could not sleep that night. I wondered around the whole night and was glad to leave this place the next morning.

Our destination was Krasnik, a small town in the Lublin district. Before the war Krasnik had a large military garrison and the military barracks remained intact. We were located in those

buildings. The first day in the barracks looked grim to me, especially after the night in Majdanek. Toward the evening we were let free and we could go out and mingle with the civilians. There were many parties organized by the local population for the arrived soldiers. I went to a few of them but one was especially interesting. This was a party organized by the Jewish survivors and, naturally, many Jewish soldiers attended that party. I got acquainted with one fellow that seemed to be very active and, as it turned out, played an important role in my future. What was also interesting to observe at this gathering was the speed with which the survivors of various ghettos and concentration camps regained their posture and vigorously and, I might add, successfully pursued their new life. One lady, who had a shoe store, was very attractive and we started dating. On one evening, when I visited her, we were supposed to have dinner together and enjoy ourselves. Suddenly we heard some unusual commotion at the first floor and on the stairs leading toward the living quarters above the store. The lady turned toward the stairs and fell in the arms of an approaching man. I learned very soon that this was her husband returning from a concentration camp. There went my date. But, obviously, I was glad for them and we remained good friends for the duration we stayed in Krasnik.

War after Victory

Not long after our arrival, we started our new war, this time with the so-called “reactionary” underground and the Ukrainian nationalist movement. The latter consisted mainly of the UPA (the Ukrainian Insurrection Army) and the Banderov fighters. The Polish underground consisted of the AK (Home Army) subordinated to the exile government in London, NSZ, a truly reactionary band and WIN (Freedom and Sovereignty).

In one of our frequent forays to capture those groups, we entered a lonely house in the middle of a forest. We spent some time talking with the owner and then left. However, before we approached the structure, we had seen a young girl running inside. Nothing suspicious. She could have been scared seeing so many soldiers. But the next day, after returning to our base, we learned from a friendly source that, while we were in the house, a group of about 20 guerillas was hiding in the bushes outside. They had just fled the house after getting a signal from that frightened girl that someone was coming. This time, they had decided not to put up a fight. Good luck! Otherwise, both groups could have been in big trouble.

In another raid on the underground, we were more successful. We captured a group in the forest that didn't have time to escape. One of them was a very nice young man, not what you would expect a guerilla to look like. After a few days, he was freed and told me many stories of

his life. We became friends. It was not that difficult to become friendly with Polish fighters who, in many cases, went to the forest because they were afraid of being arrested and being sent to Siberia for participating in the AK during the war, as was the case with my new friend. Many AK fighters were actually rounded up after the war and sent to Siberia, so their fears were not unfounded.

No friendship could be contemplated with the Ukrainian nationalists. First of all, during the war, they collaborated with the Germans, who promised them an independent Ukraine. As a result, they carried out many atrocities against Jews on behalf of the Nazis. In the post-war situation, they were fighting against the Polish authorities that wanted to expel them to the Soviet Union, where they would certainly have been persecuted. Hence, they were struggling for survival. Officially, the authorities' policy was called the repatriation of the Ukrainian population to their homeland on the Soviet side of the border. In reality, we were taking them against their will, locking them in railroad cars, and sending them across the border. They knew that they would not be "warmly welcomed" in the Soviet Union.

This policy was implemented as follows: We would enter a Ukrainian or mixed Polish-Ukrainian village and persuade the Ukrainians to leave voluntarily. We promised them transportation and gave them some time, usually a week, to make all the preparations. A day or two before the set departure date, we would return to the village and, if there was no visible movement, we would start loading their belongings onto a cart and take these people to the railway station. There we would guard them and ultimately put them into the cars and lock them up there, still guarding them until they had left.

What happened next is both tragic and inhumane. The night the Ukrainians were transported away and we left the emptied village, a band of Ukrainian guerillas set would fire to

all the buildings in the village, even if some Polish or mixed families were still there. Terrible atrocities resulted from such massive arsons. If Polish people remained in the village, their horses were set on fire and those who could not escape were killed or burned inside.

The UPA guerillas would often attack the railroad station, liberate their people from the cars, and take them to the forest. On several occasions, they also attacked the military units that carried out those expulsions.

On December 4, 1945, I was on duty in the battalion kitchen. The entire third battalion of our 8th Regiment was moving from the village of Horyniec to Kocury. My job was to make sure that a hot meal would be ready and delivered to the new location. The kitchen was to remain in the old place until the evening so that the cooking could be completed.

We were almost ready to move when the first news arrived about the terrible disaster. The columns marched along the country road and, before reaching the new location, the commander called all unit officers to give them some last-minute instructions. At that moment, a hail of fire was launched at the entire column from the little hills surrounding the road. Many casualties resulted. The commander of my platoon, Lieutenant Matejko Franciszek, was killed instantly, along with several other officers, including the battalion commander. My company commander, Jan Sakowicz, was severely wounded. It was one of the worse encounters with the UPA. I was lucky again.

On March 9, 1946, a large group of about 500 UPA fighters (including women) attacked our entire 3d battalion. At that time, we were located in the village of Lubycza-Krolewska in the southeastern part of present-day Poland, not far from the Soviet border. The UPA attacked our outposts around the village and the railroad station, where cars were loaded with "repatriants." They succeeded in taking out our outposts and were advancing toward the heart of the village

where, among others, the regiment commanding staff was located. They assaulted several buildings where soldiers and officers were resting. The regiment staff, including its commander, Colonel Zielenin, escaped through the window in their underwear. The situation was critical mainly because it was not clear to the rest of us where enemy or friendly forces were (it was an extremely dark night). A few junior officers in the room with me panicked. No wonder we had seen barbaric atrocities perpetrated by the UPA bands. They captured soldiers and mutilated them beyond recognition. Often they used saws to cut the bodies of captured soldiers. Especially scared was one junior officer who, in civilian life, was a butcher. He even slaughtered a few cows while we were staying in this area. And now he was shaking from fear, completely paralyzed, and not able to act. The remaining soldiers and officers grabbed weapons and ran out into the street. Soon, there was a sizeable group of us advancing toward the area where we heard the shooting taking place.

Between the buildings to our left, we could detect that a group of fighters was cautiously moving toward us, taking up positions 10 meters from us. At any moment they or we would start shooting and there would be a massacre. This was one of those moments when one move could make an enormous difference. I raised my voice and called to the other group to identify itself. If it was a friendly group, we were safe; if it was the enemy, then a hail of fire would be directed at the caller and the rest of us. Though risky, it was still better than starting to shoot right away.

The deputy battalion commander who led the other group immediately recognized my voice. He then let the whole group know that we were friendly, and we continued advancing against the real enemy. After we succeeded in pushing out the UPA band, the commanding officer had many kind words about my call. Apparently, I was recommended for a medal for this action, but never received it.

Those were not the scariest moments of my war after victory. I recall with horror the guard I was holding on a bridge about three kilometers from the location of our battalion. It was a very dark night. I was there alone. Any attempt to destroy the bridge by the Ukrainians would have spelled the end for me. Equally dangerous could have been their desire to catch a Polish soldier. I do not understand why the commander applied the rule of keeping guard of various objects in a friendly garrison to this dangerous place? If there was need to guard the bridge a sufficient force should have been deployed, as was the case in other spots of our location.

By April 1946, it was my turn to be discharged (demobilized, as we called it). I was offered the opportunity to become a professional officer, an offer that didn't appeal to me. So, I began preparing myself to become a civilian. I didn't know what I would do in civilian life, but my immediate concern was to get out safely from the region where the Polish NSZ was still operating. The NSZ was fiercely anti-Semitic. I'd heard many stories that they forced Jews from trains and other places and just killed them. My father's name was Israel, very easy to recognize, even if my appearance didn't betray me as a Jew. Therefore, I went to a friend of mine in the regiment's personnel office and asked him to write my name on all my discharge papers as Adam, the son of Jozef, instead of the son of Israel.

It's a shame that, after so many years of fighting for a new Poland, I still had to deal with the old fascists in the liberated Poland. With the new name, I had a chance to get through a NSZ checkpoint, although I would still be considered a suspect because of my military uniform, which they didn't like. All of my old military documents written before the discharge still had my father's correct name, Israel. Later on in civilian life, I was able to straighten out this dual-name issue.

I left my unit one afternoon after friendly farewells from colleagues and was given a horse cart with a soldier to drive me to the railway station. Up until then, I had always had my

automatic rifle or revolver with me and was aware that I could defend myself. Now that defensive assurance was taken away from me. What an irony! After all those years of fighting against fascists, I had to face similar enemies in my liberated country.

Part Two: Adulthood. Stations of new life

Lodz: Illusion and reality

I returned to Lodz like a strange place, homeless and dispirited. I didn't know what to do, how to earn a living, or to whom to turn.

I wandered in the streets, looking for the places I had frequented before the war. I went to Uncle David's grocery store on Cegielniana 53 where I used to work. They weren't there. The building was intact, but most, if not all, of its Jewish residents had perished. I met Janek, the housekeeper's son, who remembered me. The meeting was very emotional. He hugged me and looked very surprised to see me. But I wasn't sure about his sincerity.

Then I went to Kamienna Street, where under #2 was the Hochenberg hat store. Hochenberg was a friend of my father. In the early 1920s, he used to work for the Sherem Company, a manufacturer of hats, especially for orthodox Jews. Hochenberg later established his own company. He did very well before the war. Father remained a hat maker and worked for many of his old friends, including Hochenberg. He used to ask father to make him a few dozen hats of one kind or another. He was always in a hurry and wanted the hats "yesterday." When the hats were ready, I used to deliver them to the Hochenberg store and wait until I got paid. Sometimes he would pay me only a part of what he owed, asking me to come for the rest at a later time. Quite often I would deliver the hats, and he would pretend that he didn't know he had to pay. So I would stay for many hours watching how he served his many clients, while back at

home, mother waited to get some money to buy groceries. Anyway, even this place was no longer the same. Hochenberg was not there, but my memories of him were.

While I was wandering around there, a man called me from the other side of the street. He recognized me as the sergeant that was at a party for Jewish soldiers in Krasnik. He invited me to his apartment on Kamienna #3, which he shared with his girlfriend and two other young ladies. Their apartment consisted of one large room, at one corner of which a stove was installed, and a little corridor, which led to another room where a tailor lived. Before the war, this was part of a large apartment that was now divided into those single rooms.

In my memory, Kamienna was a respectable street in the middle of a large concentration of Jewish people on the borderline between the poorer and more affluent segments. During the war, it was settled more by Poles, who took over that part of the city when the Germans expelled the Jews to the Ghetto. Large apartments that used to have 5-6 rooms were now divided up into single-room units. They had no running water or other amenities. In addition, for some strange reason, Kamienna was now infested with low-class prostitutes.

Anyway, I had little choice and gladly accepted the invitation to stay with them until I found something better. In a few days, I found a roommate, who was from Novosibirsk, I think. His name was Borensztajn, and he also had an apartment on Kamienna. He was the younger brother of Jankiel, a tailor and family man with three kids. They had all come back from the Soviet Union. The younger brother was also a tailor. He was already married to a very attractive young brunette, and they let me stay with them for a few nights. But it was not convenient for either of us. I remained in the apartment when my friend had to leave in the morning to go to work. Wisely, I left the place and went back to the previous apartment. In the meantime, Jankiel, the fellow from Krasnik, got another room on the first floor of the same building and moved there

with his girlfriend. Now there were only three of us: the two ladies—Bronia and Basia—and myself. (This arrangement was similar to the *Three's Company* one on American television.)

Bronia was already working in a textile factory. She offered me assistance in getting a job at the same company, where she was being trained to become a weaver. Before the war, the Levin family owned the company. It was not a big factory, as it employed only about three hundred people. Bronia's supervisor and good friend, comrade Sulecki, was a Polish communist, who spent many years in jail, where he learned from the Jewish inmates to speak Yiddish. He was eager to help returning Jews to settle in the new communist order.

Before the war, Lodz was considered a "red" city, where the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) won several elections in the 1930s and was able to elect a socialist president of the city. The PPS was more like the British Labor Party. Despite the many bitter disagreements with the communists, they and the PPS emerged immediately after the war as the two leading proletarian parties. It was important to belong to one of these parties in order to get a job in a factory in Lodz (presumably in other places as well). Although I didn't belong to either party, the support of comrade Sulecki was very important in getting a job.

I was hired as a weaver trainee and started working directly under comrade Sulecki. He showed me all the tricks in how to start and stop the loom, and I became his assistant, that is, I worked together with him on the same two looms. Within two days, not only did I learn how to start and stop the looms but also how to connect the ruptured threads, how to put the warp in the loom, and, finally, how to operate and adjust the mechanism that controlled the design of the fabric. The looms produced scarves in two or three colors. Within a week, Mr. Sulecki let me operate his two looms without his supervision. Yes, I had a few troubles. I made some mistakes.

But, by and large, I became a reliable weaver. In a few more days, I got my first loom and a second one soon thereafter, and I started earning money.

Before the war, textile workers in Lodz made relatively good money (about 40 *zlotys* [about \$8] a week) compared to about 20 *zlotys* by a seasonal public worker and the 20-25 *zlotys* my father could earn in season, when he had plenty of orders. But the wages after the war were not that great. Moreover, management kept changing the wage scales, each time introducing new incentive schemes designed, essentially, to squeeze out more output for less money. That was the way the working-class government treated its workers. No wonder there were a few general strikes by the Lodz textile workers during which the government got a little scared. In most cases, they suppressed the strikes by all kinds of coercive means.

Things were developing nicely for me though. One morning, while I was still in bed, the door to our room opened and I saw my brother Samuel. Hurray! He had made it back safely from all those terrible places in the Soviet Union. After his return to Lodz, he wandered the streets just as I had done, and he met our Novosibirsk roommate, where I had stayed for a few days. He told Samuel where I was, and *voilà*, we were together again!

It was really remarkable how often, after losing each other while we were in the Soviet Union, we found ourselves in unexpected places. I went to the army in 1942, he was still a civilian until 1943, and suddenly we met in the same place in the GUAS organization (the organization that built airfields for the military during the war). Then again, we were sent to different airfields and, in a few months, we met in the same place. I went into the army; meanwhile, he was sent to all kind of exotic places in the north of the Soviet Union. And we managed to meet back in Lodz! We would repeat those reunions many more times in our life. But now, we weren't thinking of

any new separation. We were just extremely happy that at least two brothers of our family had found each other.

In our frequent visits to the Jewish Committee, we would leave messages about ourselves, indicating where we were in case other members of our family returned to Lodz. We had no doubt that whoever survived would return to Lodz and we should find each other. Despite our hopes, no one returned from our large circle of family and relatives. It was and still is incomprehensible that nobody survived. I still hope that maybe somebody would one day be found. This is what my nightmares tell me. God, how many times was I happy at night being together with my mother and family! Unfortunately, it was not in reality.

Bronia, the lady with whom we lived in the room on Kamienna Street, had found a cousin that visited her from time to time. He tried to suggest that I should marry Bronia, but I was not ready for it. This was before my brother returned. But now my brother, who also stayed with us, became interested in matrimony and the obvious and immediate choice was Bronia. I was very happy for them. We all had lost our close ones, and the sooner we reestablished our own families, the better.

My brother Samuel picked up father's line of business, manufacturing hats. Bronia worked in the textile mill and together they made sufficient money to start a family. They also had a place to live, which was the room on Kamienna Street. Jankiel, along with his girlfriend, had moved out a while ago. Basia, the other lady of the *Three's Company* group, also moved out to join her sister in an adjacent building. As for myself, I now had an opportunity to move to the Bursa, a place for young Jewish survivors.

The Bursa was a four-story, rectangular building on Franciszkanska 15, managed by the Jewish Committee where young Jewish survivors got room and board. The Bursa was supported

by donations from overseas Jewish organizations. By the time I moved to the Bursa, there were already several hundred young people there. It was a well-organized community full of cultural and political activities. All residents worked, went to school, or did both. It was amazing to see how those young people, who not long before had just returned from the concentration camps or from abroad and who, in most cases lost their parents and relatives, were now developing their new life with such vigor and enthusiasm. They reinforced and inspired each other, especially in the desire to go back to school. There were already some that attended the Lodz Polytechnic, wearing special crimson-colored hats, or the University, wearing white hats. It was impressive to watch them; at the same time, the atmosphere created by their enthusiasm for learning was contagious.

One day I met a friend with whom I served together in the army. He was older than I and was studying medicine. The first thing he asked me was whether I intended to go back to school. Frankly, I wasn't thinking at the time about going to school. It wasn't in the tradition of my people to go to school at the age of 22. It was also not in my thinking to become a scholar or intellectual. It was just not there; I wasn't ready for it. But that conversation planted some seeds, which started germinating in my mind.

The political party Bund was represented in the Bursa by several its members, the most well known being Avreml Zeleznikov. No so prominent were the various Zionist organizations. The organization with the most members was the youth section of the Communist Party. I learned that Bund organized evening courses for adults, where they taught ancient history, the Yiddish language, literature, and social sciences. I signed up for ancient history and very much enjoyed the lectures. I got the taste of learning and liked it. This experience, combined with the atmosphere in the Bursa, ignited in me a desire to do some more studying.

But the decisive event that brought me back to school was when my roommate and Bund activist Kuba Goldberg visited the evening course. He brought the news that Prime Minister Jozef Cyrankiewicz (at this time the leader of the PPS) signed a circular requesting businesses to provide stipends for young adults who wanted to go to school to upgrade their education. I don't recall whether there were special provisions for war veterans, but it certainly wasn't a drawback. I decided to take advantage of this opportunity and apply in my factory. I asked for an appointment with the director of the company that was still semi-private. Its owner, Mr. Levin, probably perished during the war, so the government took over the mill, but didn't formally nationalize it. It was a rather small mill, unlike the giants in Lodz, such as Poznanski, Widzewska Manufaktura, Geier, or Eisner, which employed thousands of workers.

The meeting with the director wasn't successful. He said that the Prime Minister could write whatever he wanted but that the factory would not provide any assistance. A circular letter was considered rather a suggestion, which could be ignored without any negative consequences.

At that time, the government didn't have the absolute power that it usurped later. Despite that drawback, I made up my mind to become a full-time student. I was counting on some part-time work; I was counting on the Bursa, where I would be getting room and board, as well as on some assistance from the *Cukunft* (the youth organization of the Bund), which I had joined by then. With these basic supports secured, I applied to a special school called Preparatory Courses to Higher Education. This was an intensive, abbreviated seven-month course, which could be followed by a full year of intensive studies toward admission at a university or a polytechnic school. A successful graduation from this preparatory school automatically allowed entrance to these institutions of higher learning.

Although these were speedy courses, the instruction was very good. They assembled a group of very dedicated and highly qualified professors, sympathetic to the needs of these unusual students. The curriculum was shortened, but not at the expense of important and critical material. The student body, although diverse and of unequal degrees of preparedness, was very diligent and hardworking.

I had no difficulty graduating from the first part of the course and was admitted to the preparatory class of the Lodz Polytechnic in the department of electrical engineering. I managed to hold a few odd jobs during the summer to replenish my financial resources and started the academic year in October 1947. In the fall of that year, I got a good job as a night guard in the manufacturing shop of the cooperative Igla, a garment company established by the Bund. The job was good because, after 7 o'clock in the evening, when everybody had left, I locked the door, did my homework, and slept at night. But the job didn't last too long.

These were still times when the fiscal policies of the state were in the process of being established. The managers of the cooperative didn't provide any official bookkeeping. They collected money from the sale of the garment, paid wages and salaries, and put the rest in the pocket of the managers who, subsequently, shared the profits with the Bund organization. But these were the last days of this kind of freedom. The government was establishing all kinds of new rules, among them the payment of an income tax based on the employee's wages or salaries.

One day, after only a few weeks of working as a night guard, when I went to the office to pick up my earnings, Mr. Jozef Dorenblat, the Director of the cooperative, asked me whether I was good in the Polish language. I said that I was okay and asked what he needed. He showed me a new government circular and asked me to read it and tell him whether I understood what to do.

I didn't have any difficulty understanding it. Actually, it was a mathematical, not a linguistic, problem.

The government introduced a payroll tax for the first time. Until now, workers received their wages in a net amount, that is, they didn't have to pay any taxes. The new rule was that the company has to subtract from the wages a given tax and leave the take-home pay of the workers unchanged. It meant that the company had to establish a gross wage, subtract the tax from it, and make sure that the net wage was not less than before the introduction of the tax.

"Do you know how to do this?," Dorenblat asked me. Upon receiving a positive reply, he gave me the whole list of about 250 employees and asked me to prepare a revised payroll, which was to incorporate that new rule. As a result, I lost my guard job and became a part-time (initially) white-collar employee. In addition to this task, I was introduced to Mr. Korkuczanski, who was the part-time accountant. He was supposed to set up an inventory of all material goods and keep the books up-to-date. And so I got involved in bookkeeping as well.

During the summer of 1947, I also became attracted to a beautiful girl at the school. All of these events were a sure combination to cause my failure in academic work. Studying electrical engineering required a total commitment. Instead, I was missing many classes and barely completed the first semester. The second semester was even more demanding and my graduation became more problematic.

I decided to transfer to the University Preparatory Year, where my chances were much better. What I had learned of mathematics, chemistry, and physics at the Polytechnic was almost sufficient to pass the exams at the University. I could catch up on the other subjects. My calculation was correct, except for one subject: introduction to music. Since this was a liberal arts curriculum, this subject was compulsory. I attended only one lecture and found I knew nothing

about it. This was also the only subject to which I went to the exam without any preparation. And it was a disaster. The professor asked me a question about some music theory. I started to answer, "According to me...." She immediately interrupted, "Not according to you, but..." and so on. I wish the professor had asked me about liturgical music, which I knew a little bit about. No. She insisted on that particular theory. Obviously, I failed. With one unsatisfactory mark, I couldn't graduate.

Now the issue of what to do with me was debated among the professors. I was at least a B student on all other subjects. It would be an injustice if they didn't let me graduate and continue my education because of this one non-critical subject. In the end, they convinced the music professor to change my mark to the lowest passable one. And I got my certificate of graduation.

The country went through various political campaigns, most of which were designed to circumvent the Yalta agreements to set up a democratic, coalition government in Poland and to hold free elections. Yes, they allowed Mr. Mikolajczyk, exiled Vice-Premier of the Polish Government, to return to Poland to join a coalition government as its Vice-Premier. But almost from the beginning, a vicious political campaign against him was launched. Finally, by the middle of 1948, he fled the country because his presence endangered him.

The other important campaign was the drive by the Polish Workers Party (the Communists) to arrange for the unification of the two proletarian political parties. There was strong opposition within the PPS (the Socialists), who were afraid, and rightly so, that such unification would mean the end of their party, establishment of a one-party system, and a totalitarian dictatorship. That opposition was constantly attacked as being against the best interests of Poland's working class. Slowly, the opposition was broken by co-opting more and more leaders of the PPS to the idea of a unified workers party and by promising Jozef

Cyrankiewicz, then General Secretary of the PPS, that he would get the post of Premier in the new government. By the end of 1948, a unification congress was supposed to be held and the new United Polish Workers Party established. Gomulka was supposed to be the leader of the new party.

Even before the unification of the two political parties, their youth counterparts—ZWM (League of Fighting Youth-the communists) and OMTUR (youth Organization of the Association of Workers Universities, the socialists)—were united by the middle of 1948. The *Cukunft* (youth organization of the Bund), to which I belonged, was equivalent to OMTUR. Before the final act of unification in the summer of 1948, the leadership of Cukunft and many of its activists decided to leave the country illegally rather than to stay and be subjected to all kinds of repression because of their refusal to join the united youth organization ZMP (League of Polish Youth).

Avreml Zeleznikov (the “partisan” as we called him because, during the war, he was fighting the Nazis in a Jewish guerilla group in the Lithuanian forests) was my roommate in the Bursa. He was also the leader of the Cukunft in Lodz and a member of its Central Committee in Poland. Zeleznikov didn’t show up for several days in the Bursa and nobody knew where he might be. Simultaneously, rumors started that other leaders of Cukunft and Bund were missing. It became clear after a few days that they had left the country. Among them was Abraham Kahan, Leader of Poland’s *Cukunft* and later a professor of economics at the University of Chicago.

But the disappearance of Zeleznikov had a more immediate effect on my situation. After I learned that they had escaped, I looked around to see what was left in the room. To my surprise, I found a revolver under the pillow of his bed. Zeleznikov was carrying a weapon legally since he was a socialist leader who, at that time, could be attacked by anti-socialist forces. Even though I didn’t have the right to have the revolver, I had a strong desire to retain that nice automatic TT 9

bullet revolver in my possession. I decided to place the revolver under my pillow, assuming that if they came to search the room, they would, most probably, look in his bed, not mine. On the other hand, if they found the weapon in my bed, it would be easy to explain that I didn't know anything about it since Zeleznikov put it there.

After a few days, the secret police and the Bursa manager did search the room and, of course, found the revolver where I put it. Luckily, they didn't suspect that I put the revolver there.

After that episode, I didn't resist joining the ZMP organization. It became a massive, patriotic youth organization to which a large majority of young people belonged. The pressure to join ZMP was enormous—at school, in factories, in the military, and in all other institutions. With time, it became extremely difficult to advance in any field without belonging to the ZMP. The word *belonging* describes well the relationship between members of a communist organization and the organization itself. The people belong to the organization, not the other way around. And the organization (or for that matter, the Party) is highly centralized, and it belongs to the leader. In effect, we all belonged to one person. A few years later, in 1956, Gomulka, who had regained his leadership of the Party after being jailed in the interim, complained that even he was not free to lead under the Stalinist regime in Moscow. Stalin, he said, was the sun, while all the leaders of the communist parties in the so-called “people's democracies” were satellites orbiting the sun and absolutely dependent on it.

In the summer of 1948, Palmiro Togliatti, General Secretary of the Italian Communist Party, was wounded in an assassination attempt in Italy. Orders came down to all factories, including our cooperative, to hold rallies condemning that political act. Mr. Dorenblat could have made the proper speech but strongly resisted on the grounds that his Polish language was not

good enough. I think he refused for political reasons. In any event, he insisted that I make the speech. I didn't want to do this because I had never made a political speech in front of a large audience. Dorenblat didn't want to hear my argument. "You will do it and that is final," he said. The meeting was supposed to start within an hour, and I didn't have time to prepare anything sensible. But I wrote a speech, and it turned out alright. That was my inauguration as a speaker, a function I was to perform many times in my life, but mostly on economic, not political, subjects.

The Togliatti-rally speech had additional repercussions for my career. Mr. Dorenblat was looking for someone to be appointed cultural officer of the company. Solidarnosc, the umbrella organization for many cooperatives in Lodz, insisted that such a position be established in each cooperative to provide cultural services to its employees. Mr. Dorenblat offered me the job, which carried a salary of 30,000 zlotys a month. This was a lot of money at that time. I couldn't resist such a lucrative position. I performed relatively well in this function, which was a mix of organizing cultural events and social work. One of my achievements was a New Year's ball in the first days of 1949 for all the children of our employees.

This new position and salary created favorable conditions for continuing my studies. In the fall of 1948, I was admitted to the Warsaw Commercial School, which established a satellite campus in Lodz. I decided to study economics. At the University there was a Department of Law and Economics, which, I thought was more theoretically oriented. I felt that I would do better in applied economics and that the curriculum at the Commercial School was more appropriate for me.

Unfortunately, my expectations that I would find sufficient time to work and study didn't materialize. I missed many lectures and seminars and, after a year of being enrolled, I didn't have much to show for it. My education was in serious doubt. During my first year of studying, I was

befriended by my classmate, Jurek (Israel) Grynbaum. He was an excellent student. I could equal him in mathematics, but he was much better than I in humanistic subjects. During the time I was fighting a war, he was reading a lot. Grynbaum also studied at the Commercial School. Although he did much better than I did during the 1948-1949 academic year, mainly because he was not gainfully employed, in subsequent years, when he had to work for a living, he too neglected the studies and, as I later learned, never graduated.

Before the start of the next academic year, I had to think through how I was going to resolve the dilemma between working and studying. Fortunately, luck struck again. By the end of August 1949, many of my friends from the Bursa were taking a crash course on the Russian language in preparation for being sent by the Polish Government to study in the Soviet Union. Those that qualified were offered a stipend of 800 rubles a month and were sent to various universities in the Soviet Union. I was not thinking of applying because I feared that going to the USSR might be dangerous after my escapes from Novosibirsk and the Red Army. If they discovered this, they might invoke some legal statute and cause me big trouble. But by the end of the courses, the Polish Ministry of Higher Education was short of the planned number of candidates, mainly because some students withdrew at the last minute. The Ministry was desperate for new candidates that could fill the gap without preparation. Here I fit very well. My friends suggested my candidacy to them, and I was called to Warsaw for an interview. Everything fit well except my marks, which were not that high. I explained to them that I hadn't had enough time to study since I had to work for a living at the same time. I was accepted. Hence all my problems were resolved for now. I could devote all my time to studying. In a few days, I prepared for my next trip to the Soviet Union.

Moscow: The center of indoctrination. Stalin and the Kremlin

I spent five years in Moscow, graduating with the highest marks, the equivalent of *cum laude* in American universities. During those years, I learned a lot about the workings of the Soviet system and the Russian people. Some of my teachers were very good, but others, especially those teaching social sciences, had to strictly follow the Party line or at least not deviate from it too much. Only Stalin could change the teaching, and he did a few times, one on linguistics and the other in the political economics of Socialism. After publishing a brochure on the latter subject, Stalin caused a complete reversal of the theoretical treatment of many subject matters. Professor Soloviev, who was teaching political economics, came to the class one day and announced that everything that we had learned up to now would have to be revised. I mention this in order to indicate that the regime, specifically its supreme dictator, had absolute power, not only over political, economic, and social issues, but even over scientific subjects, as well. In all these spheres, his was the final word.

I attended a session of the faculty on the subject of Stalin's scientific discoveries in political economics. A very heated debate ensued between two clearly-defined factions: One represented by the philosopher Zhudin, who maintained that Stalin's work raised the level of economic and philosophic sciences to new heights and the other group, led by a courageous agrarian professor named Solertinskaja, suggested that many, if not all, of Stalin's scientific discoveries were really not entirely new. Stalin, she maintained, had been stating similar views

before in his writings and speeches. It was only a matter of proper reading and interpretation to see that those prior statements explicitly or implicitly were leading to his current views. Here, the chair of the meeting, professor Zhudin, exploded and switched the argument to a political one. "It means," he said, "that Solertinskaja cannot swallow the obvious that Stalin reached new, genial heights of scientific formulations. She is trying to diminish his great achievements." Solertinskaja did not buckle under his attack. She continued to defend her view. Even under those terrorist conditions, there were still honest scholars. Many scientific discussions on less controversial subjects took place in our Institute, which made it a great school under those conditions.

May Day and the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution (November 7, according to the new calendar) were special for many reasons. First, these were the only two days when Soviet people were allowed to demonstrate on the streets. These were not spontaneous demonstrations, as we know them in other countries. Nevertheless, at the time I observed them, most people enjoyed themselves and were even dancing in the streets. Second, in preparation for those holidays, food supplies were much greater throughout the country, even in Moscow, where it was always better. You could buy citrus fruits, for example.

The various work places and schools organized the demonstrations. The time to arrive at those places was usually set a few hours earlier than needed. Since May 1 and November 7 were not usually warm days in Moscow, we had to freeze a little before we actually started moving toward the center (Red Square and the Kremlin wall), where the Party bosses received the parade. Most of the time, we kept ourselves warm by having a few drinks before leaving home and by dancing to the music of a *garmoshka* (chorus of bystanders).

In Moscow, the demonstration was moving extremely slowly, especially in the first few hours when huge lines were directed toward the main city arteries leading to Red Square and

Kremlin. The demonstrators were given banners and slogans to carry and were met by loudspeakers playing music and shouting the official slogans approved by the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Occasionally, specific greetings were shouted, for example, when a line of a famous enterprise or a group of students entered the Square. In the latter case, the announcer would praise the Komsomol and the Soviet youth for being in the vanguard of the struggle for peace and for preparing themselves to become the cadres of future development of the Fatherland.

The most exciting moment came when we finally marched into Red Square. We thought, “Will he be there or not? Will we finally see him?” Of course, I am referring to Stalin. Most of the time when we entered Red Square he wasn’t there. Since we were in the Moskvoretsky District, we happened to be in a line very close to the Kremlin wall and the Lenin Mausoleum. But we usually entered Red Square after at least two hours since the start of the demonstration; by that time, Stalin was already tired of watching and listening to all this noise and probably went for a snack and a little rest inside the Kremlin. Usually, he would reappear once later on. That’s why we never knew whether we would see him this time or not. And seeing him was considered a big event.

At the May parade of 1952, we entered Red Square at about 2 o’clock in the afternoon. The lines were moving neatly, and we heard the traditional slogans as we approached the Lenin Mausoleum, where on its balcony, all the dignitaries greeted the parade. Then everything suddenly stopped. There was an enormous roar. Looking toward the Mausoleum, we saw him coming from the top of the stand down the steps leading inside to an underground entry to the Kremlin.

Here he was greeting us, stopping again at the bottom of the staircase. The crowd went wild. Never in my life did I see such a wild, ecstatic sea of people, screaming, yelling, and falling into each other’s arms, jumping full of joy. The group of foreign students, in particular expressed

their extreme happiness. They finally saw him after all those years of disappointment, just like in the pictures (maybe not that tall), the leader of all nations, master of all sciences, Father of the Soviet people, the great and beloved Stalin. I don't want to say that I didn't share in the enthusiasm of the moment, to some degree.

But I wasn't dancing and screaming. Rather, I was observing what was going on around me and putting it into my memory. For some reason, I had stored away the picture of Valtr Komarek, a Czech student who was very happy and who later, during the Capitalist revolution in Czechoslovakia in 1989-1990, played a leading role and was even for a while deputy Prime Minister.

But an additional reflection on this event is worth mentioning. Did the people know what kind of beast in human skin Stalin really was? Did they know how many millions died because of his policies and actions and how many millions were murdered and perished in the Soviet gulags? At that time, among students especially, there was no mention of such things, for obvious reasons of fearing to become an additional victim of Stalin's regime. But did they know of his crimes and what was their feeling deep in their hearts? I honestly believe that only a few students knew about it. The vast majority believed in the propaganda and sincerely admired their leader.

Stalin suffered a stroke and died on March 5, 1953. Before I describe the events surrounding his death and funeral, a few words need to be said about the so-called "doctors affair." When one reads the history of Stalin's terror and the fantastic, now unbelievable, stories cooked up accusing his closest comrades, party leaders, and legendary military commanders and even the KGB chairmen themselves, the indictment of the leading physicians, who for many years took care of Stalin's and other leaders' health, sounds completely normal; that is, such fantastic accusations happened before. But in those days, when many, especially young people, didn't

know or remember much about the political trials of the 1930s, the doctors' accusations probably seemed unbelievable. The shock was enormous, especially among our medical students, whose very best professors were among the accused. Shock and disbelief. Some terrible mistake! Imagine those respected doctors and academicians, deliberately trying to cause Stalin's death by false diagnoses and inappropriate medical treatment. Not one, but many of them were accused of being in collusion with and acting on behalf of Zionists and foreign enemies. And it so happened that all those involved were of Jewish origin. What a plot and what an incitement for arousing anti-Semitic feelings and even pogroms. All this happened by the end of 1952 and was discovered by an obscure physician that was not even close to the Kremlin physicians. How could people believe in this? Many did not. It was too much.

And then Stalin died. Apparently he was afraid to take medication and to be seen by doctors for fear of being poisoned. Whether true or false, he didn't have proper care when he had the stroke. That's how Beria (his interior minister) arranged things to happen. In all probability, a complicated game was being played out by Beria, who thought that this time he was going to be faster than Stalin and would not be his victim as so many KGB bosses before him were. In other words, in order to avoid the faith of his predecessors, Beria tried to get rid of Stalin first. And he succeeded. Soon after his death, the story about the doctors was called a complete fabrication in an official statement in *Pravda* (the Communist Party newspaper). Wasn't Beria preparing the whole story in the first place?

The news of Stalin's death was a shock to the public. His greatness led people to believe that he was also immortal. And suddenly, at not too old of an age, he died. The shock was enormous. I was in a factory in Moscow on a student practicum with a group of students from my class. Each time a statement was read about Stalin's medical condition following the stroke,

everyone ran to the radio to listen. At the time they broadcast his death, people were openly crying. At our Institute, a memorial service was held in the large aula, which was specially decorated for the occasion. Speaker after speaker, some very distinguished professors could not suppress their grief, and, in the middle of phrases, started crying like babies. Obviously, this atmosphere was contagious. It looked like people sincerely grieved the loss of their beloved leader. They wondered how and by whom the country would be governed, whether the country would ever be able to find a leader of Stalin's qualities.

Stalin's body lay in state in the most prestigious place in Moscow, the so-called Column Hall of the House of Unions. Millions of people wanted to see him and pay their last respects. Obviously, not all could be accommodated. A group of Polish students, including myself, decided to try to get through to the Column Hall of the House of Unions. The place was located in the center of the city at the corner of Gorkii and Manezh streets. Many subway lines, as well as above-ground transportation, led to this place. But during those days, all the approaches were blocked off by military trucks on the ground and by disallowing all subway stops leading to the center of Moscow.

Nevertheless, we tried to get through. We got off the subway at Majakovski and continued on foot toward the House of Unions. The roads were all closed for traffic or pedestrians, except for those who had special passes. The streets were barricaded by military trucks and guarded by soldiers. We tried the old trick of showing our foreign passports. With a few additional words why we thought we must see Stalin's bier, we were let through many times. The closer we came to the place, the denser the checkpoints and barriers. Finally, we were allowed to join a huge line along the sidewalk leading to the building. We were moving slowly and in silence until we finally entered the Column Hall. There were mountains of flowers surrounding

his bier. Various orchestras were playing sad music and many dignitaries and official delegations were holding the honor guard around the bier. The guards were changing often. We approached Stalin's bier and paid respect. The atmosphere was very subdued and also somehow surreal. It was difficult to realize that this absolute ruler was now dead and couldn't do anything. Was it good or bad? At that time, we didn't know. Yes, the troika that immediately took over power intrigued us: Malenkov (more or less expected), Khrushchev (not clear), and Beria (ominous). Malenkov's pronouncements at and following the funeral were somewhat encouraging. The Soviet people didn't have to wait too long to hear about impending changes. Malenkov stressed issues of standard of living and consumption. Rumors were reaching the academic community about serious disputes on theoretical issues with a revisionist flavor. Not long after that, the Beria affair developed. Unreal, unbelievable, and in the old tradition of making him a spy working for British and other intelligence agencies since the 1920s. But as incredible as those accusations were, the fact that Beria was removed from power was a welcome event.

The rumors about revisionist tendencies in the leadership must have been true, since, in a few years, Khrushchev, who soon became the Party leader, denounced Stalinism in his famous secret speech to the XX Congress of the Communist Party held in March 1956. But this is getting somewhat ahead of the story. In the meantime, political prisoners started coming home. Even before that, Voroshilov, who became the country's president (Chairman of the Supreme Soviet), declared amnesty for criminal prisoners. As a result, many criminals returned to Moscow and other cities and immediately started terrorizing innocent people. They unceremoniously robbed people, even in public view, and if somebody tried to resist, they literally slashed their faces. It took many months to rid the city of that menace.

Life in Moscow was not only confined to study. I took advantage of the many cultural and

other attractions it offered. Foremost was the Bolshoi Theater, with its operas and ballets.

MCHAT, the leading dramatic theater, and other highly regarded theaters were always a source of cultural enrichment. The museums in Moscow were a fantastic place to enjoy and learn about world-famous artists and their masterpieces. The Polish embassy was the meeting place for students and our own cultural talent show. We had a choir, a dance group, and individual poetry readings and musical performances. We prepared productions for international student festivals and performed on other occasions.

I will never forget the picture of the Jewish-looking Slavek dancing the Krakoviak, which he performed very well. The embassy was also the place of our political meetings and, from time to time, lavish banquets on national holidays (both Polish and Soviet). We enjoyed these parties for their excellent and plentiful food and drinks.

In the spring of 1954, we got the exciting news that a group of Polish students would be given permission to take a tour of the Kremlin. This was extraordinary news because we never dreamed of being able to see this place from the inside. The Kremlin was the “forbidden city” that no ordinary person could visit. And now it would be open for us. Certainly, it was a sign of the changes that were taking place after Stalin’s death.

We were among the first foreign student groups for whom a tour of the entire Kremlin was organized. Of course, special passes were prepared for us to enter this grandiose, historic place. The huge interior plaza consisted of many fabulously domed churches. Only the highest domes could be seen from the outside. We visited several of them, including the Cathedral of the Dormitron (*Uspenski Sobor*), which was built in the second half of the fifteenth century by the Italian architect, Fioravanti; the Cathedral of the Annunciation (*Blagovieshchenski Sobor*), built at the same time by Russian masters, and the Cathedral of the Archangel (*Archangelski Sobor*),

erected in the beginning of the sixteenth century by Italian architects. Over time, the cathedrals were enlarged, reaching those magnificent forms we can observe today. These places of worship were not the ones ordinary Russians could attend. They were erected for the Russian rulers, their families, and distinguished guests. They were essentially museums—richly ornamented, full of masterpieces of the best foreign and Russian artists, and exquisite interiors filled with gold and gems.

We visited the Great Kremlin Palace, where, among other halls, we saw the magnificent Hall of St. George and the huge hall where the Supreme Soviet and the Central Committee of the Communist Party held their meetings. A year earlier, nobody had been allowed to take a photograph outside the Kremlin. But even now, not all visitors were shown the biggest treasure of the Kremlin, the State Armory. Let this name not mislead anybody. Many centuries ago, it was the place where the best Russian masters produced arms. Over time, it was transformed into a repository of the most precious artifacts of royal gifts from many countries of the world with which Russia had political or economic relations. It became the richest museum of applied art from the best masters of the world, including an enormous collection of Russian art. Our student excursion into the Kremlin included a visit to this famous place. I recall, in particular, a hall where there were exhibited gifts received by Stalin on the occasion of his 70th birthday. I am not able to describe them after so many years. However, one that was very impressive stuck in my mind. It was a gift from Mao Tse Tung. It was a tiny cylinder-like ball made of ivory, about one inch in diameter, inside of which a congratulatory message was engraved. It was so tiny that one could read it only with a magnifying glass. The precision of the Chinese artist's work was truly wonderful.

Even the best writer cannot adequately describe the whole visit to the Kremlin. It has to be

seen. But, seeing it only once is not enough. Nevertheless, this visit was the highlight of my five-year stay in Moscow.

I was surprised at seeing all of these treasures, knowing how poor the Russian people were. More importantly, I wondered how these treasures, many of them of religious content, and all those cathedrals had been preserved so well, despite the many upheavals, revolutions, wars, and Communist rule. The magnificent cathedrals surprised me most. Knowing Moscow well after having lived there for five years, I had seen many churches (according to legends, there were forty times forty churches in Moscow). Most of them were closed, converted into cinemas or storage buildings. Apparently, there is a continuity of Kremlin rulers, irrespective of political bent, and a realization that the Kremlin and its riches reflect on the might of the Russian State.

Moscow was also lucky for me on a personal level since I found my future wife there. A small group of Soviet students distinguished themselves from the rest, both by age and maturity. Those were students who worked during the war and were late in graduating from high school. These students were usually more mature, they had experienced many hardships during the war, and had personally contributed to its victory. Among them was Zina, my future wife. We started talking to each other sometime during 1951 and became more seriously involved in 1952. Initially, we weren't thinking about marriage, because marriage between Soviet and foreign citizens was not allowed under Stalin. We enjoyed each other's company and didn't think far ahead.

But Stalin died and the situation changed. Sometime in the fall of 1953, the law prohibiting marriages with foreigners was changed, and with it our relationship. We started seriously preparing ourselves to marry and to establish a family. In February 1954, we were officially married.

The marriage ceremony was extremely simple. We applied to the district office of the vital

statistics bureau for a marriage certificate. The office was not different from all other offices in the Soviet Union—a few desks cluttered with papers, an ink container, and a nib-pen. The officer, a young woman, checked our identities, perhaps asked a few questions, and started to put all the necessary information into a ledger. After that, she typed the certificate of marriage, pronounced us husband and wife, and we were free. Oh yes, there were two witnesses to this ceremony: Nina and Jerzy Zachariasz. While there, we learned that earlier it was even easier than that.

Awaiting our turn to enter the marriage office, we noticed an elderly couple watching us and smiling. We couldn't understand why they were smiling, but, after a while, they explained their behavior. "You see," the elderly man said, "I am now marrying my wife for the second time. I married her many years ago, when you weren't even born. After a few years I divorced her, but she did not know about it until lately when we needed our marriage certificate, which was taken away from me when I divorced her. The law at that time allowed either side of a married couple to divorce by making the appropriate statement to an officer in an office similar to the one we are all in now. In our case, it so happened that we had an argument one morning. I was mad, and went right out to the divorce office. In the afternoon, my anger was gone, and I went home not telling my wife that she was divorced. We lived that way for another 30 years." The "new old" bride was smiling at this story, as were we and the "new old" groom. Then we were called into the office and couldn't witness their new marriage.

Within a few months after our wedding, both Zina and me graduated with distinction. Before leaving the Soviet Union, Polish students organized a tour of the southern part of the USSR, which included the Ukraine (Kiev and Odessa), Rostov, Crimea, Georgia (Tbilisi, Suchumi, and Batumi), Azerbajdzhan, and Armenia. Naturally, it was a very interesting tour, during which we learned more about the people and beauty of those places. A particularly

interesting part of the trip was the ride from Odessa to Georgia in a luxury, air conditioned (I experienced this for the first time in my life) liner, which belonged to Hitler until 1945. The Soviets got it as part of war reparations and used it as a cruiser in the Black Sea.

Our colleague Hanka Tarnazhevskaya married Koka Bziava, a fellow student from Georgia. During our trip, we visited his parents' house in Batumi. They prepared a lavish party for the entire group. The party was interesting because of the Georgian custom displayed there. According to Georgian tradition, the head of the household starts with a toast on some pleasant and interesting subject. Each participant around the table adds something on the same subject in subsequent toasts. Since there were about 30 people, many toasts were made and much wine was consumed, which is also a tradition in this land of fine wines.

Since I'm on this winery subject, let me also mention another pleasant custom of Georgians. The next day, while we were sitting in a restaurant, the waiter brought us a bottle of wine, which we had not ordered. We told the waiter that this was a mistake, but he insisted that we take the wine, pointing to a table in the other corner where our friends were greeting us. The custom is that, when you meet your friends in a restaurant, you don't join them but, instead, send them a gift. Very nice custom, indeed!

After my return from this wonderful trip, I had to pack everything and go back to Poland. Zina had not yet gotten the documents in order to go with me, but I could no longer stay in the Soviet Union. The time for separation, albeit temporary, arrived. It was not pleasant but we were hopeful that everything would work out. But you never knew. I returned to Warsaw a married man, but without my wife.

Warsaw: Family and profession

In a few months, Zina joined me in Warsaw and we were together again. Both of us were assigned to work at the Central Planning Commission, which was preparing economic plans for the Council of Ministers. This was a very high-level assignment due mainly to the education in Moscow, where we learned the theory and methods of Soviet-type planning, which by that time Poland had fully adopted.

Initially, I joined the Department of the Construction Industries, since I wrote my Master's thesis on the subject of reducing the costs of construction. Zina joined the Department of Economic Cooperation with Foreign Countries. Her knowledge of the Polish language was still minimal but her advantage was the Russian language, in which most business was conducted.

I was the first member of the Construction Industries department that came from the Soviet Union and was, therefore, met with quite a dose of suspicion. It was 1954 and the people were still politically terrorized. Despite a very warm reception from the department's directors, Mr. Malachowski and his deputy, Mr. But, I felt a degree of isolation from coworkers. At one of the meetings, I even dared to criticize Stefan Jedrychowski, the Vice-Premier responsible for the construction sector of the economy. I was very naïve and allowed myself to repeat stories I had heard from colleagues that Jedrychowski was very rude at meetings with experts. I said that a Communist leader should be courteous to his subordinates. I think that non-party members could only interpret this comment as strange and suspicious: "Who is he that allows himself to criticize

such a high-level leader?" But, within the Party, it sounded like a wave of fresh political air. It resulted in my election to the Party committee while I was away on vacation in the summer of 1956.

After Stalin's death, the political situation in Poland started to destabilize, following similar events in the Soviet Union. Beria, the head of the Soviet KGB at that time, was accused of all kind of treacherous deeds, including espionage. He was sentenced to death and executed in December 1955. Then, in the Spring of 1956 the XX Party Congress of the Soviet Union was held, where, among other things, Khrushchev in a secret speech, which fairly soon became widely known around the world, revealed the enormous atrocities committed under Stalin at his orders. That secret speech was given to Party cells in Poland (and in other countries) to be read by Party members only. Poland's President, Boleslav Bierut, did not return to Poland from the XX Congress in Moscow. Many suspected that his sudden death involved foul play.

The summer of 1956 heated up politically. A deep crisis developed in Poland's leadership. New forces pushing for considerable liberalization were clashing with the old Stalinist leadership of the Polish United Workers Party. Ochab, General Secretary of the Party, and others were trying to bring back the previously imprisoned leader, Wladyslaw Gomulka. Communist youths at the universities were revolting, demanding a change in policies away from the Stalinist methods. Factory workers were angry at the bloody suppression of the uprising in Poznan during the summer of 1956. The economic situation was very grim. The standard of living declined, instead of the promised prosperity, which was supposed to result from the realization of the Six-Year Plan (1949-1955). Many more atrocities perpetuated by the secret police became known and angered the public. Change was in the air.

Under these conditions, the Party Committee in the Central Planning Commission decided

to clean up the abuses that were taking place in the agency itself. A white paper was supposed to be prepared reviewing what had happened over the years of the Stalinist regime and recommendations made how to change the situation. A first draft of the paper was rejected because it didn't go far enough. I was assigned, together with Comrade Slavin, to prepare a second draft. In this way, I got involved in a heated struggle for political liberalization, which ultimately led to the event of October 1956 and the return of Gomulka to power.

Stefan Jedrychowski, the person I had criticized a year earlier, was appointed Chairman of the Central Planning Commission and, indirectly, became my boss. After his arrival, I neither heard nor witnessed, in the few meetings that I attended in his presence, any impoliteness toward his subordinates. It was not in his nature. Quite the contrary. He was a model of modest behavior. Did he change his behavior after the 1956 political upheaval? Maybe. I shall describe his role in the events of 1968 later on. In the meantime, let us return to private life.

Zina and I got a room in the Planning Commission's Training Center in the Mokotow district of Warsaw. It was a school building; along the corridor on both sides were classrooms and a lavatory at the end of the corridor. Under the extreme housing shortage conditions in the post-war devastation of Warsaw, it was reasonable for young people without children to live there.

Both of us were given the title "senior advisor," with a starting salary of 1,150 zlotys. It was sufficient for a comfortable, but not extravagant, life, mainly because our rent was very low. Nevertheless, this was a temporary solution, and we had to press the issue of getting a normal, albeit small, apartment. The expectation that we could get an apartment through normal channels was close to nil. But we were part of the highest echelons of the government and, although the city administration was managing the housing stock, still the central government was given priority consideration. All this did not help until one day (June 22, 1955), I went to the Personnel

Department with the good news that our first baby was born that day. I said that there was a good chance that, in a few days, when Zina came back from the hospital, our newborn boy would make so much noise that students in the class opposite our room would not be able to hear their teacher. It worked. They made some deal that they would be given one apartment in advance of next quarter's quota from a reserve held by the Prime Minister. Imagine what kind of trouble we caused them. Anyway, this was the procedure, which the authorities had to follow. Within a few days, I got the keys to a nice little apartment on the right bank of the Vistula River named Praga. It had two rooms and a kitchen. I bought the minimal furniture necessary and, when Zina came home with the baby (we called him Włodzimierz at that time but changed it to Walter later on), she was pleasantly surprised.

The country went through a few months of extreme nervousness. On the one hand, society, including the Party, was ready for fundamental change, albeit the latter still within the confines of a socialist system. On the other hand, the Soviet Union was afraid that this movement in Poland and also in Hungary could get out of their control and might endanger their empire. At one point, in the fall of 1956, Khrushchev and a few other Politburo members suddenly showed up in Warsaw with the intention to intervene militarily. There were movements of Soviet military units toward Warsaw. At the time, I was visiting the Polish Parliament (*Sejm*) and witnessed a parliamentary inquiry by deputy Drobner (previously a member of the Polish Socialist Party) to the Prime Minister about movements of Soviet Divisions on Polish territory. Although Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz admitted that such movements were under way, he assured him that the situation would be resolved peacefully. The Polish leadership persuaded Khrushchev that the political changes in Poland presented no danger for the Soviet Union.

The situation in Hungary was more critical and therefore dangerous. The Stalinist regime

in Hungary had been even harsher than in Poland and, encouraged by the events in Warsaw, the demands for reform went much further, including at the height of the revolt, a demand to leave the Warsaw Pact. That uprising ended tragically with a bloody intervention by the Soviet Army.

By the end of October, the much expected change in the Party leadership finally happened. During the extraordinary meeting of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers Party (Communists), there was a general mobilization of Party cells throughout the country. Along with the clear desire by a large part of the Party to retain the Socialist direction of the country's development, there was fear that revolutionary fever might move too far to the right. The center of the reformist, perhaps I should say revolutionary, movement was the Warsaw Polytechnic. Tens of thousands of students rallied day and night as the meeting of the Central Committee approached. I tried to enter the Polytechnic building, but students blocked strangers from coming inside.

I desperately wanted to participate. I found ways through back doors and shifting from one floor to another on different sides of the building to finally reach the place where the students were rallying. The central part of the Polytechnic building was a rotunda with balconies leading to classrooms on four or five levels, from floor to ceiling. That's where the students were rallying. The noise of their approving or disapproving screams was so high that it was impossible to sustain for more than a few minutes. And yet, most students had already been there for days. When I arrived at the Polytechnic, they were playing the tape of a speech made at the Central Committee meeting by the Chairperson of the ZMP, the youth communist organization. Her speech was received with great enthusiasm. I would be remiss not to mention a line that was, at that time, incorporated into a political cabaret produced by the student theater: "And the shit attached itself to the boat of the revolution and is calling let's sail." So the students wanted to clean the

revolution from the impurities. That was the prevailing view among the revolutionary students.

There was joy and hope that Poland would now be able to manage its affairs in a more humane way with greater degree of independence. Gomulka became the First Secretary of the Party and practically the head of the government. At the end of the stormy session of the Central Committee of the Party, he gave a very encouraging speech condemning, in the most blunt terms, the Stalinist regime and promising a more liberal and independent policy. He called a rally at the plaza near the Palac Kultury (the high-rise building, ostensibly a gift from Stalin to the Polish nation) attended by more than 300,000 enthusiastic listeners. He summarized the events leading to his return to power and, at the end, called for the rally to stop and to start working. Except of a few minor protesting demonstrations at the front of the Soviet Embassy, no serious disturbances occurred.

A few names of streets and cities were changed. One of Warsaw's most beautiful avenues, Aleje Ujazdowskie, had recently been renamed Stalin Boulevard and, during the German occupation, it was called Adolf Hitler Strasse. Now, the old name was reinstated. Similarly, Katowice, the industrial center of the Silesian region, had been renamed a few years earlier to Stalinogrod. It got back its old name, Katowice. There were probably similar changes in other cities.

The final act of celebration took place a few weeks later, when Gomulka, as the head of a delegation from Poland, went to Moscow. During a farewell rally in Warsaw, and subsequently in each place where the special train stopped, people were singing the "sto lat" song, which ordinarily is sung at birthday parties. This time the song acquired a political meaning, wishing Gomulka a "hundred years." I am sure many people later regretted their well wishes, but, at the time, those were spontaneous feelings expressed toward the new leader. The message was clear:

“Be tough in the negotiations with the Soviets.”

In mid-1955, Poland regained one of its best-known economists, Professor Michal Kalecki. We knew very little about him, although he was the undisputed precursor of the world-famous Keynesian theory that revolutionized economic policy throughout the world. Before this time, his name was never mentioned in Moscow or maybe also in Poland's universities. During the pre-war time, Kalecki started out as a student in the Gdansk Polytechnic and subsequently turned to economics. Before the war, he left Poland, thus avoiding the fate of many Jewish victims of Nazi Germany. During the war, he worked at the Oxford University Institute of Statistics, where he concentrated on issues of war economy. He made outstanding contributions to the analysis of the dynamics of the capitalist and socialist economies. After the war, he headed the Industrial Department of the Secretariat of the United Nations, where, among other tasks, he was charged with preparing the World Economic Reports. In 1955, Professor Kalecki was invited to return to Poland by Hilary Minc, the Deputy Prime Minister responsible for economic development, who appointed Kalecki his Chief Economic Advisor.

In early 1956, I met Professor Kalecki for the first time at a lecture he gave for economists in the Central Planning Commission. This was truly an extraordinary lecture. He was very precise. He used mainly mathematical formulas to develop his argument and prove his points. After the lecture, he got a standing ovation, which is not often conferred on an economist.

A few years later, Professor Kalecki was asked to head a team of economists to develop a fifteen-year Perspective Plan for Poland's economy. I was invited to join his team of economists. Our section consisted of three economists (Adam Jozefowicz, Izaslaw Frenkel, and myself) and was charged with preparing a section of that plan dealing with population growth, labor supply and demand, productivity, and employment. My part, in particular, focused on labor demand,

productivity, and employment. I recall Professor Kalecki's return because it had a profound effect on my professional and personal life. I'll return to this part of the story later.

In 1959, I joined Wiktor Buch, Director of the Department of Perspective Planning, where I was now employed, in a business meeting in Prague, Czechoslovakia. There, preliminary discussions were being held on coordinating the two countries' perspective plans. At that meeting, I learned that the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (known as the *Comecon*) was about to establish a working group that would compare levels of productivity in member countries. This was something I believed I certainly should be involved in. After a short while, in early 1960, the first meeting of the productivity group was called, again in Prague. It was an initiative of the Czechoslovak government, and they were asked to lead that effort. I was sent with two other experts to attend. Thus, a new phase of my professional activities, which lasted for more than eight years, had begun. It required considerable work, in addition to my normal duties, but it also gave me many opportunities to travel to Comecon countries.

In January 1961, Professor Kalecki was invited to attend a United Nations conference on productivity in European countries. He graciously recommended me to represent Poland at that meeting, and the UN Secretariat for Europe accepted his recommendation. This was my first visit to a Western country, and I was very excited.

On the way to Geneva, I marveled at the beauty of the Alps in the wintertime. I remember not sleeping almost the whole night in order not to miss this once-in-a-lifetime chance to travel by train through the snowy Alps on a moonlit night. And it was worth all my sacrifice. Unfortunately, this was not the only sleepless night during that trip.

During the official meetings, Halina Diamand (head of the Polish delegation) and I spoke in Russian, one of the official languages at the UN. Maria Worowska, a member of our group,

spoke in French, while Mr. Ehrlich conversed in English. We were the only delegation that used three languages at the proceedings. The issue of using only the official languages at the UN is taken very seriously.

The delegation from the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) tried to present their papers in German. Each time they tried, the chairman of the conference, Mr. Pierre Gonod (a Frenchman), interrupted the Germans, asking them to use one of the working languages. Obviously, the FRG delegates deliberately tried to use German, since they attempted to incorporate their language into those most widely used and sanctioned by the UN. And that was at a time when they were not even official UN members. I wonder why people talk only about Jewish *chutzpah*?

The head of the US delegation to the conference was Dr. Greenberg, Commissioner of the US Department of Labor. He presented results of productivity comparisons of producing men's shirts in various factories in the US. It so happened that I had a much broader inter-company comparison in Poland, and my results differed somewhat from his. I took the floor and juxtaposed my results with his. It was a nice exchange, and I couldn't imagine at that time that, thanks to that exchange, he would remember me eight years later when I showed up in his Washington, D.C. office. He not only remembered me and was very helpful, but also remembered Halina Diamand and inquired about her as well.

In 1957, our second son Edward was born. Zina interrupted her professional work to take care of the children. In 1959, she re-entered the labor force and started to work at a foreign trade enterprise called Rolimpex. The experience she gained there was very helpful when she joined the Department of Foreign Trade in the Central Planning Commission a few years later.

Between 1960 and 1968, I was very active in the work of the Comecon group, dealing

with international comparisons of labor productivity. This subject was part of a larger program of the Comecon's Economic Commission. Professor Kalecki was the head of Poland's delegation to that Commission. My participation in that work was very rewarding professionally. In addition to developing the methods of those comparisons and, in particular, ascertaining the factors that determined the levels of productivity, I participated in the international negotiations of Comecon countries as the head of Poland's delegation of experts. This also gave me the opportunity to travel to all Comecon countries and enhance our income as well.

I decided to use the work I had done for the group of international productivity comparisons in a doctoral dissertation that I was about to undertake. On March 8, 1968, I was on my way to Warsaw University to register for their doctoral program. The procedure required the presentation and defense of a doctoral dissertation and taking two exams in political economics and philosophy. However, I was not allowed entry into the university that morning because a student demonstration was in progress. As it turned out, this was the beginning of the end of my life in Poland.

The collapse of the mirage

In the summer of 1967, the military authorities ordered a wide mobilization of reservists. By that time I had been promoted to the rank of lieutenant and was called to report to the Warsaw air base in Okecie. All the previous years after graduating from the University I managed to avoid being called for active duty. This was a privilege available in the Planning Commission, of which I eagerly took advantage. The General, head of the military department in the Planning Commission, was kind enough to write letters to the regional military headquarters asking for a deferral from service because of some important assignment that could not be postponed. I had used that excuse several times. But in 1967, none were acceptable as the political situation was very tense. The six-day war in the Middle-East between Israel and the Arab countries had just started. The Soviet Union's position was clear: Full support for the Arab countries. Poland initially took a somewhat ambiguous position, clearly deviating from that of the USSR. Edward Ochab was then President, and his statement was more objective than those of the remaining countries of the Warsaw Pact. At least he didn't blame Israel as being the aggressor, which it was not. That sign of independent thinking was rectified immediately. On June 9, 1967, a meeting of the Warsaw Pact signatories in Moscow decided to break diplomatic ties with Israel.

Within a week, the Israeli Ambassador to Poland left the country under a chorus of some 200 drunken, outraged Poles, who were brought to the airport by the secret police. A few weeks later, Gomulka, in a speech at the Trade Union Congress, criticized Zionists and Poles of Jewish

origin, calling them the “V column,” a very dangerous accusation for the remnants of that community in a country far from being free of nationalism and bigotry. Gomulka also invited Jews to leave the country, if they so desired, since, as he said, “Polish citizens should have only one Fatherland.” That was a reference to the happiness apparently expressed in some Jewish circles about Israel’s victory in the six-day war with Arab countries. In those days, a joke by the famous novelist, Antoni Slonimski was circulating in Poland. He said, “I agree with comrade Gomulka that everyone in Poland should have one fatherland, but why should it be Egypt?”

It is interesting that not only Jews were happy with the outcome of the war. The general sympathy was with Israel for some strange reason. Some explained this by the surprise brevity and valor of the Israeli fighters, which was contrary to the stereotype many Poles still harbored in their minds. Others saw in this an expression of the Soviet Union’s disapproval. A widespread story circulated in Poland that “our Jews beat their Arabs.” One should also not overlook the simple decency of people who witnessed the aggressiveness of the Arab countries, especially of Nasser, Egypt’s president.

Since I was in the armed forces, I could observe the mood and sympathies of the Officer Corps of the Polish Army. I served at an air base near Warsaw and traveled every day in a special truck, which brought many officers to the base. Initially, they were very happy when they listened to the boisterous communiqués of the Egyptian command about how many Israeli planes they had shot down. Their mood changed somewhat after they heard the next day the news that the Israelis had shot down a lot of Egyptian planes, not the other way around.

Still, the next day, I heard repeated stories that German SS officers were commanding the Israeli army. What a bizarre propaganda invention! Then the tone changed to stories about how well equipped each Israeli soldier was. “Imagine,” they said, “each one of them has a radio at his

disposal.” And finally, on the fifth or sixth day, I heard them say, “We were told that the Jews didn’t know how to fight. What a lie and BS.”

The political commissar of the base assembled us one day, and let his anger out, saying “We behave like Christians; when you get hit on one cheek, you turn the other one.” He got a lot of approval from many present officers. They were clearly disappointed with the outcome of the war; maybe they wanted a little adventure to teach the Jews a lesson themselves or help the Arabs push Israel into the sea?

Despite that hostile attitude toward Jews, they introduced me to their secret gear at the repair shop for the air force where, in case of war, I was supposed to serve as an administrator of the shop at the rank of a major. In the meantime, I was sitting all day in a separate room, looking out at the runway where the military planes took off. I was given to read some silly brochures on how to behave in case of a nuclear attack by the Americans and other imperialists.

It was terribly boring, and I finally asked them to give me something to do. They asked whether I could give a talk to junior officers serving on the base on the economic situation of the country. I gladly agreed and, one late afternoon, met the group near the runway and outlined my thoughts to them. I was rather critical of the situation at that time, but didn’t realize how hostile those junior officers were toward the government. They freely expressed their dissatisfaction with government policy and openly criticized Prime Minister Jozef Cyrankiewicz. One officer reacted jokingly that he had not heard of any example in history of a corporal making a successful revolution. Was he right?

After ten days, I was demobilized. The mobilization clearly indicated that they were counting on some dangerous developments, possibly an intervention by Warsaw-Pact countries, which didn’t materialized because of the quick Israeli victory, which had negative repercussions

for the political situation of Jews in Poland. The notion of a V column, or, as others said, “a state within a state,” equated the few remaining high positions that Jews still held to a government separate from the rightful Polish authorities, which was ominous. It suggested that invoking the Jewish problem, especially the V column, was a serious political mistake by Gomulka, which gave an excellent opening to his rival, General Moczar, to begin an anti-Jewish campaign. General Moczar, a right-wing, nationalistic politician, who held posts in the Ministry of State Security (the police apparatus) and the powerful Association of War Combatants and Resistance Fighters, was aspiring to usurp power from Gomulka. He had a strong following in the Party apparatus, as well. The notion of a V column was improvised by Gomulka, and was not approved by the Politburo. The Politburo, represented by President Ochab (a Politburo member), strongly reacted, demanding that this word be stricken from the published speech. Apparently, this was the first time that censorship was applied to a First Secretary of a Communist party. Be that as it may, it was used effectively by the Moczar faction to launch its anti-Zionist (but, in fact, anti-Jewish) campaign.

It would not be correct to assume, however, that Moczar was waiting for that signal or that, without it, he wouldn't have found another pretext for launching the attack on Gomulka and his team, using the deeply ingrained, anti-Semitic bigotry as a convenient vehicle. The Moczar group, which operated out of the Ministry of State Security (secret police), had infiltrated the Party apparatus and the Party cells in most government institutions quite some time ago. In the Planning Commission, those in Moczar's group were systematically replacing the old-generation Communists. Moczar's people were held in reserve until the signal to attack was given.

Historians have not yet decided whether the play *Dziady* in Warsaw's National Theater was a clever plan orchestrated by the Moczar group to provoke demonstrations and crack down

on democratic forces. In any event, it is a fact that it created an enormous upheaval among intellectuals and students, first in Warsaw and then in most academic centers of Poland.

Written by the most venerated Polish poet, Adam Mickiewicz, and staged by Kazimierz Dejmek, the play *Dziady*, at the end of 1967, was applauded, especially the lines referring to the Russian Tsars' despotism, police methods, and stupid bureaucratic machine. Gomulka later quoted the following lines, which especially offended him as politically incorrect: "No wonder that they are cursing us here. For a century long Moscow is sending to Poland the worst scoundrels in droves." The show's leading actor, Gustav Holoubek, and entire cast were received enthusiastically with 10-15 curtain calls.

From the time the play opened, the party leaders and apparatus were unhappy with the show, charging that, instead of its anti-Czar expression, Dejmek had underscored the anti-Russian aspects, which, according to them, were politically wrong. There were even rumors that the Soviet Ambassador expressed his displeasure and suggested canceling the show. Soviet authorities apparently denied these rumors. Most active in spreading such rumors were Moczar's people. By January 30, 1968, the Party reached a decision to cancel the show. That decision caused widespread protests among intellectuals and students. A large group of students attended that last show, holding a banner calling for "independence without censorship." At the end of the show, they organized a demonstration in the theater that lasted 30 minutes and then, joined by many others, they went to the monument of Adam Mickiewicz on Krakowskie Przedmiescie. There, they were met by the police, who arrested many of the participants. The next day, the press announced the arrest of many students, singling out mostly those with Jewish-sounding surnames or those known to have been of Jewish origin.

The students' next move was to write a petition to parliament, protesting the closing-

down of *Dziady* at the National Theater and, more generally, defending national culture and freedom of expression. They started collecting signatures under that petition and, within the first two weeks of February, had collected 3,145 signatories in Warsaw and 1,098 in Wroclaw. Irena Lasota delivered the petition to the *Sejm* (Parliament) on February 16.

I happened to know Irena Lasota from her short stay at our Institute in Moscow, where she was enrolled during the 1950-1951 academic year. Irena started out on a left foot, so to speak. First, she had some strange fainting spells. Initially, we treated them seriously, but, the more she had those attacks, the more they looked to us as pretended. In addition, and more importantly, she audaciously expressed very critical views about Soviet literature and many other social ills. We couldn't understand whether she was a very courageous person or whether she didn't understand what she was doing. It was out of order to spread such critical views in the Soviet Union, especially for a foreigner, and we understood that the Polish authorities wouldn't tolerate it. After many discussions with her, in which she defended her views, the Polish authorities decided to withdraw her from Moscow. Irena's behavior since that time confirmed the view that, at her young age, she already had a clear, determined opinion about freedom of expression, which many of us learned much later.

After a few more attempts to discredit Kazimierz Dejmek, Director of the National Theater, party authorities decided to expel him from the Communist Party. Later on, he was also fired from his position as artistic director of the Theater. In the meantime, the Moczar group spread propaganda material against "Jews that are trying to teach us about the values of our national culture." Their aim was to provoke the independent and opposition circles to some action, which would then be used against them.

By mid-February, the Warsaw Literary Union decided to collect signatures calling for a

special session of their organization to consider the situation of the Polish culture in connection with the closing of the *Dziady* spectacle. They succeeded in adopting a resolution demanding far-reaching changes in cultural policy, liberalization of censorship, and the return of *Dziady* to the repertoire of the National Theater. Many famous and highly respected writers expressed critical opinions about the government's cultural policy and against censorship. The meeting ended abruptly late at night when the chair learned that many trucks with so-called workers had surrounded the building and were pressing to get inside to let the writers know what the working class of Warsaw thought about the speeches they were making. How did they already know what was being said at a meeting that was still in progress? And why did the Party members leave the meeting a half-hour before those trucks arrived? It was clearly another provocation of the Secret Police to create a political atmosphere to suit their own interests.

Not long after that, on March 19, 1968, a meeting of Warsaw Party activists was called at which Gomułka lashed out at the writers' special congress. He accused them of not being interested in Poland's cultural life but in their cynical political games against the government and its leadership—a standard communist tactic used so many times before. But the high-level reaction to the writers' meeting and the propaganda campaign against them in the media signified that the Party, and certainly the Moczar faction, was not interested in calming down the political situation. Quite the opposite, they did everything possible to ignite the political situation further.

Provocations were continued at Warsaw University, as well. It took the form of a war of leaflets between the democratically-oriented student masses and a group of anti-Semitic provocateurs. Within that context, the university students decided to organize a massive demonstration in support of their grievances. Among them was the punishment of students (who very heavily fined) for the demonstration at the Mickiewicz monument and the pending

recommendation by the university president to expel two student leaders: Michnik and Szlajfer, both of Jewish origin. The rally was set for noon on March 8, 1968. It was declared an illegal rally by university authorities because they didn't sanction it. Up to a point, the rally went according to the organizers' intention. The students presented two resolutions, one, prepared by Irena Lasota, calling for general freedoms guaranteed by the constitution and an end to the repression of students who participated in the previous demonstration. The other resolution expressed the students' support for the decisions of the extraordinary meeting of the Warsaw Literary Union, dealing mainly with the removal of *Dziady* from the National Theater repertoire. It looked like the students were ready to leave the rally when the trouble started.

Suddenly, about seven or eight busses with "excursion" signs entered the campus. The "civilians" or "workers" that stepped off those busses immediately ran toward the students and started pushing them, initially gently, but then more forcefully. There was no doubt that those so-called workers or "activists," as the official press later characterized them, were actually policemen. This followed from the well-organized, professional way in which they acted. The students started calling them Gestapo because that was the way they looked and behaved. A small group of about 200 students who belonged to the official Socialist Youth Organization openly started to coordinate their activities with the "excursionists," showing them which students should be beaten and later arrested. The so-called activists were armed with truncheons filled with metal instead of the ordinary rubber used by police in other mob-control situations. The vice president of the university, Zygmunt Rybicki, asked the students to leave within 15 minutes. The students wanted guarantees that the "workers" would not attack them. At that time, the dean of the Economics Department, Professor Czeslaw Bobrowski, arrived on the scene. The students sent a delegation to Rybicki. They demanded the withdrawal of the "workers" and the militia

surrounding the university and the return of student IDs that were taken from many of them. Professor Bobrowski, in his dean's robe, circled among students, asking them to go home since the rally had already accomplished its task. He then talked those from the busses, and they agreed to leave as well. The students were also promised that the concentration of militia around the university would be withdrawn. The students, headed by Dean Bobrowski, started to leave. However, instead of withdrawing, the "civilians" and the militia returned to the university plaza and started beating students viciously. They were hitting right and left. It was not the usual application of truncheons to disperse demonstrators. They wanted to teach them a lesson by hitting hard, without any mercy. Many eyewitnesses described that they were holding the students, and hitting them repeatedly, even girls, when they were already lying unconscious. Ironically, this was the day when Communists "celebrate" Women's Day.

The "workers" were aiming especially at brunette girls, assuming that they were Jewish. Even older people that could easily be assumed to be professors were not spared. The "workers" followed the students, who were running into the university buildings, and continued beating them. Blood was running profusely. They closed off the neighboring streets and attacked everyone who was there but especially young people, not necessarily students. It was a massacre. Different militia and special army units, as well as those "workers," participated in the beatings. It was organized and supervised by the Party apparatus (Warsaw Party secretary), in conjunction with the secret police. By evening, provocative rumors were spreading that a pregnant student had been killed. The same rumors, with calls for revenge, were disseminated the next day. Many provocative leaflets were distributed that clearly were not written by students. Their aim was to incite further unrest and the building up of a strong accusation against the students. It also aimed at discrediting the student movement by televising a few days later the live student, Maria

Baraniecka, who was apparently killed. All that material was forwarded to Gomulka, who eagerly believed in it and used it in his address to Party activists on March 19.

Over the following days, the controlled press described the events of March 8 as excesses by hooligans and disoriented students, falsifying everything that had actually happened. That was the next provocative step that caused the students to continue their protest. On March 9, students of the Warsaw Polytechnic organized a protest rally inside the school. During that rally and subsequent days, students used in their demonstrations the slogan “the press lies!” At the end of this rally, they formed a column of about 5,000, which subsequently grew to 20,000, and marched toward the office of the newspaper, *Zycie Warszawy*, which had first published a false account of the March 8 events. The students burned the newspaper, calling for the workers and population of Warsaw to support them. People on the streets were throwing flowers at the students, openly expressing their support.

The authorities met the demonstration with violence again. This was only the beginning. The student revolt had just started. The authority’s approach to the revolt took a new twist. It went all out to make this a Jewish problem. Two leaflets, disseminated on Sunday, March 10, started that new approach. In the first, entitled *Whom Do You Support*, they listed the names of some of the student leaders; if the names didn’t sound Jewish enough, they added information about parents or previous names to make it absolutely clear who they were. In addition, they included comments that would show that these people were children of the establishment who despised workers and peasants.

In a second leaflet, they again made clear that the protest demonstrations were inspired and organized by Zionists. The implications were clear: “Don’t let yourself be led by Jews and Zionists.” This was the tone subsequently adopted by the official propaganda machine to build up

a case against the few thousand remaining Jews in Poland. It was applied to Jews across all social strata, from those in high governmental positions to the janitorial level.

In the meantime, the student revolt spread across the country to nearly all academic centers of Poland. On March 11, a huge demonstration was held in Warsaw near the Communist Party Central Committee building. It was commented later that Moczar deliberately allowed the demonstrators to approach Gomulka very closely to prove to him that only the police could handle the situation. The security forces attacked the demonstration, and a fierce battle between them and the students developed. Battles engulfed a large part of downtown Warsaw. In some places, ordinary hooligans and rioters infiltrated them.

There were many demonstrations in other cities. In my hometown of Lodz, students marched through the central Piotrkowska Street without incident. However, the press didn't notice that march but gave publicity to another demonstration by black students from African countries whose slogans read: "We protest against the Israeli aggression" and "Zionists out from the University." In addition to the wave of student demonstrations in many cities and the various provocations and distorted information about these events, the Party started organizing anti-Jewish rallies in working places around the country. During those staged rallies, party activists made speeches and, in most cases, the workers stood silent, barely reacting to the exhortations of the speakers. Nevertheless, the rallies achieved the expected result of preparing the masses for the widespread purging of Jews from most positions they held, not necessarily limited to governmental or Party apparatus positions. The common slogans used at those workers' rallies were "Zionist to Dayan" or "Zionist to Palestine." The lowest point to which the Communist Party sank was on May 1, when its central newspaper, *Trybuna Ludu*, published a front-page banner from a factory decoration that read: "Zionists to Palestine." This was the same slogan used

by the pro-Nazi and right-wing extremist party before the war. Using the word *Zionists* instead of *Jews* didn't mislead anyone.

The wave of purges started with the firing of such leading professors at the Warsaw University as Bauman, Baczko, Morawski, and Brus. It then spread to government agencies, always preceded by stormy Party meetings where accusatory speeches were made based on material delivered by Moczar operatives. Such a meeting was held at the end of May (or early June) at the Planning Commission where I was present. The meeting lasted three days and was thoroughly prepared for. For almost two months, various colleagues had told me about horror stories of all kinds of mismanagement, embezzlement, and utter incompetence of institutions or agencies where Jews held leading positions. I always wondered where they got this information, since it was not usually written in the papers. Moreover, this information was in the hands of people not previously considered well informed. Only later did I learn that they were given the task of spreading those rumors by the security apparatus. Many of them were also the main accusers of those in the Planning Commission, who were attacked at that infamous party meeting.

People of Jewish origin held several positions of departmental directorship in the Planning Commission. Most of them were long-time party members, some since pre-war years. Among them was Halina Diamand, head of the Department of Employment and Wages. She was a war hero. She had served as a commander of a tank battalion, and her name was often associated with heroic battles of that tank unit. Immediately after the war, she secured plant and equipment from being taken over by the Red Army, which temporarily occupied and administered plants on Polish territory. From that assignment, she was transferred to the Central Planning Commission (CPC), where she headed the above-named department. In the early 1950s, she was elected Party Secretary. Those were times of severe Stalinist methods followed in the Communist Party of

Poland.

There were other people with similar or less heroic pasts, who were nominated to high positions in the CPC. One case included my college classmate and close friend, Jerzy Zachariasz, who, together with me, was assigned to the CPC in 1954 after our graduation and return from Moscow. Zachariasz started out in the position of “senior advisor,” as did many other graduates. In a short time, Jerzy proposed radical price reform, the main idea of which was to base Poland’s price system on world prices. The paper he presented on that subject found approval from many experts and, because Department Director Augustowski was leaving his post, Jerzy was offered to head the Department of Costs and Prices. He was one of the youngest directors in the CPC. His appointment was based strictly on his education and ability.

Jerzy worked closely with Professor Kalecki and reported to Chairman Stefan Jedrychowski, a Politburo member and Deputy Prime Minister. Not all persons of Jewish origin held high-level positions at the CPC and not all that did were attacked at the Party meeting in the late spring of 1968. They chose to attack by name only some, but by implication, all stood accused. What were the accusations? If one followed their logic, it would be difficult to point a finger at any particular transgression. In most cases, there were none because most of these people worked very hard and did a good job, given the system and circumstances. So, in the case of Halina Diamand, they recalled some of her actions as Party Secretary. But in each case and in each speech (about 40 during the three-day meeting), a more general picture was painted of Jews that were incompetent, that did not have the proper education for the job (Halina Diamand studied at the Lwow Polytechnic in the 1940s). Even more generally, they argued, “Why are so many Jews holding high positions? Look at the proportion of the Jewish population and the positions they held in the Planning Commission and elsewhere in government.” And then they

would go on to cite examples of tailors or shoemakers who had suddenly become directors or even ministers. Many of these Zionists, they said, not only mismanaged their agencies but, in many cases, embezzled a lot of money, set up secret accounts of hard currency in Swiss banks, etc. Many stories were told about the joy expressed at parties, celebrating the victory of the Israeli “aggressors.” Some of the orators, who themselves could barely formulate a good sentence, were accusing their Jewish coworkers of not knowing the Polish language and speaking in a way that sounded more like Hebrew. This was applied to Mieczyslaw Rakowski, a very talented thinker who wrote several books about perspective planning and the long-term direction of Poland’s economy. They didn’t limit themselves to coworkers in the Planning Commission. They also talked about many people in the government in order to make a more general case.

One got the impression that this was a gathering of neo-Nazis and that a Dark Age had descended upon the few Jews that still remained in Poland. The comparison with the rhetoric of the National Democrats (ND) of pre-war Poland was striking. The only difference was that, in those days, there was a Polish Socialist Party (PPS) so that, each time the ND hung up an anti-Semitic proclamation on billboards, the PPS could respond immediately and in kind. At this meeting, very few expressed indignation. Tadeusz Gede, vice chairman of the CPC and a member of the Central Committee of the Party, grumbled for a half an hour but didn’t say anything of substance and certainly not opposing the unjust smearing of people he knew and had worked with for a long time. Only Chairman Stefan Jedrychowski had the courage to characterize the speeches as right-wing, ND rhetoric, which he had heard before the war. But even he sounded apologetic and defensive when it came to all the rumors and innuendos against good people. The previous foreign minister, Adam Rapacki, disagreed with the anti-Jewish campaign. In protest, he left the party meeting in his ministry and never came back to work. Rumors had it at the time that, when

he was confronted with a list of Jews to be fired from his ministry, he added his own name, even though he was not Jewish. Whether he actually did that was later disputed. Nevertheless, it is an undisputed fact that, in protest of this policy, he left his prestigious post. It is interesting to note that Rapacki came to the Communist Party from the pre-war PPS (the Socialists). Unlike the Communists, most of them were faithful to their ideological precept of internationalism. In a few months, Jedrychowski was removed from the chairmanship and nominated minister of foreign affairs. In a statement made many years later, Jedrychowski repeated that he “felt at that time that he was at an ONR rally (ONR was a semi-fascist organization in prewar Poland).”

Those three days, I was sitting in on the Party meeting with Halina Diamand, who intended to take the floor and defend herself. The motion was to expel her from the Party. I told her that there was no point in her defense since the verdict was already in and it would cost her a lot of aggravation for nothing. But she insisted, and got the floor the third day of the meeting. All these days, she took a lot of pills to ensure she would be calm when she had to get up to rebut. But the pills didn't help. Instead of talking, she was crying. I am sure that her accusers were delighted to see her in this broken-down emotional state. I had been right—the decision was to exclude her from the Party. Along with her, they expelled Zygmunt Adelis, Director of the Department of Internal Trade; Leopold Held, a highly respected chemical engineer; and Franciszka Oliwa, who held a technical job in the archives.

In addition to those excluded from the Party, which was tantamount to losing the job as well, many more Jews were fired as a result of that meeting. Among those was my close friend, Jerzy Zachariasz. It is interesting that Chairman Jedrychowski did the firing personally. What did this mean? Couldn't he resist the pressure put on him by people who didn't match his position in the government? Or did he essentially agree with the critique of the personnel policy in the CPC?

Either way, it was absolutely clear that nobody was going to defend the remnants of the Jewish community in Poland. It was time to reach for conclusions.

My own situation was not that precarious. I was not attacked personally, but that didn't mean I could pretend that nothing was happening. A few coworkers visited me in my office and clearly tried to provoke me into a discussion of various matters that I would express critical views about, which could be used against me. I didn't fall into that trap. Then they hired for my section a fellow that had no knowledge about our work who, I was sure, was from the secret police and sent him with me abroad to meetings of the Comecon productivity group. That was a few months earlier. I recognized the situation and was careful. They weren't lucky here, too. Finally, they didn't allow me to go to a meeting, which was supposed to have been held in Bulgaria. Instead, they appointed the new fellow leader of the Polish group of experts. That was final proof that I was out of favor.

There was more pressure put on my wife, Zina. Although she was not Jewish, they did many things to impress on her and others that she was Jewish. Her manners apparently were Jewish, meaning that she was already contaminated by her Jewish husband. Then they started to treat her as a person that could not be trusted; namely, whenever a secret document about trade with Vietnam was involved (Zina was responsible for economic relations with Vietnam), she was not allowed to use it freely in her work as she could previously. All these changes in our work situation were clearly meant to make it easier for us to reach the decision to emigrate. That was the ultimate goal of the Moczar group as far as the Jews were concerned. They were faithful to their slogan: "Jews to Palestine."

Another factor that weighted heavily on the decision-making was the sudden alienation we felt in Warsaw. The building where we worked started to look strange to me. I recall meeting at

its entry Mr. Gabot, an acquaintance from Hungary, but I had no desire to greet him. He looked to me like a person I had never known. He was a person of the past. It was very strange behavior on my part. One day, I went home with a woman that lived in the same building where we lived and I told her that all these streets and buildings that I so loved and was happy to see them coming alive in the city, which I liberated, suddenly looked strange to me. They clearly took away from me the city and the country where I was born, grew up, and fought for and where my parents, brother and sisters, and many relatives were murdered.

Many years later and in a different place, I was called in a synagogue to the reading of a portion of the Torah. As always, one is asked to give one's name and one's father's name. In my case, it was Abraham-Mojshe, the son of Israel. People always envied my name. They would say, "You have everything—Abraham, the Patriarch and founder of the Jewish nation; Mojshe, the Jewish leader who liberated them from Egyptian slavery and gave the world the Ten Commandments; and Israel, the name of the land and of the Jewish nation." Throughout my life, I had to make a few very important decisions related to my names. In 1943, when I wanted to join the Polish armed forces, I was rejected by a Soviet officer in a coal mine in Siberia because, according to him, my Jewish name disqualified me from being sent to the Polish Army ("It is not a Jewish army," he argued). I decided to escape from that place and, when I reached the Polish Army, I said my first name was Adam. But I was still the son of Israel. In 1946, when I was being discharged from the Polish Army, I was confronted with a situation where Polish neo-Nazi bands were hunting Jews, especially in military uniforms, and killing them. I decided to discard my father's name of Israel and asked a good friend who was preparing my discharging documents to write "Adam, the son of Joseph." This is why part of my military documents, which were written before the discharge, still have my father's name Israel. Later on, I re-established the correct name

of my father. Now, in 1968, I was asked by neo-Nazis with Communist Party membership cards to condemn Israel, the name and symbol of my father and nation. At a meeting of the Party cell, they asked every Jewish member to condemn Israel. I didn't want to do this. I preferred to leave that gang, so I turned in my membership card.

I started thinking about leaving the country. I realized that my family would go through a terrible trauma. Walter and Edward, our two sons, were never told about their father being Jewish. We wanted to spare them possible trouble from still existing anti-Semitic feelings in part of Poland's population. Going to Israel, which was the only official avenue for emigration, would have meant revealing to them the precarious situation we were in and that could have caused them a severe shock. They themselves learned from their neighbors and schoolmates that a Jew means something bad.

I was not sure what Zina's reaction would be to my desire to leave Poland. I rather suspected that she would be against emigration. After all, she had grown up in a system where going to a capitalist country was considered terribly wrong. Besides, emigration could mean (and it actually did until the demise of the Soviet Union) that she would be unable to see her mother, sister, and relatives in the USSR. To my very pleasant surprise, Zina immediately agreed to the idea of emigration. This was one of her best decisions in life. She understood well what was going on in Poland and the only sensible thing to do was leave. There was an additional reason. During her 14-year stay in Poland, Zina had met many examples of hostility toward Soviet citizens and Russians in particular. There's no need to go into the details of the historical reasons for such an attitude. These nations—Poland and Russia—had been fighting each other for centuries.

Application for emigration also meant losing our jobs. In case of not being allowed to emigrate for some reason (for example, being exposed to secret information), this could put us in

a very precarious situation. Similar hardships could result from a considerable delay of the permission to emigrate. Even if we successfully overcame these hurdles, the big question was how the Soviet Embassy would react to Zina's application, since she was nominally a Soviet citizen.

We spent many nights walking with the Zachariaszes on Warsaw streets considering all these issues before we made the final move. We spent even more time thinking through what we were going to do if and when we found ourselves abroad. First we talked about where to go. What were the options? What country was accepting Jews from Poland? We definitely didn't want to go to Israel. In my case, I considered that Israel would be a very difficult country for Zina. We heard that Australia, Canada, and the United States were accepting new immigrants. All these were countries where I had some advantage since I knew enough of the English language. Australia was the most desirable country because my brother Sam, as well as Zachariasz' sister, was there. But we also considered the opportunities for suitable work and came to the conclusion that the U.S. would give us the best chance. We mulled over in our minds numerous scenarios where our services might be needed and where we could contribute. There were talks about research institutes and individual professors that might need research assistants. We came up with the ideas to translate documents in foreign trade companies and to assist with knowledge in this area. We didn't even avoid considering the possibility that we would have to work as dishwashers. But deep in our hearts, we believed that something would turn up and we would manage. After all, many immigrants came to the U.S. before us and they ended up alright.

The next step was to prepare all the necessary documents and submit them to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The emigration office of that Ministry was in the Palac Mostowskich, a place renowned after the war for interrogations by the secret police. Nobody liked to go there. After receiving their permission, we had to go to the Dutch Embassy, which represented the interests of

Israel after Poland severed diplomatic relations with that country. If going to the Palac Mostowskich was unpleasant, going to a capitalist country embassy was scary because of the way the police state viewed people who dealt with foreign countries. But this was still ahead of us. Before that, we had to overcome an unexpected technical problem.

We quit our jobs at the Planning Commission and prepared all documents for the Palac Mostowskich. Zina took the children and went to Moscow for a month to stay for the last time with her mother. When I submitted the documents, they requested a photo of myself together with the children. How was I going to do this without their presence? Delaying the whole procedure for a whole month was out of question. Something must be done. We came up with the idea to prepare a photomontage from individual pictures. We had to find a photo laboratory that could be trusted that would not denounce us for that forgery. After having made such a picture, I was apprehensive to go to the police and submit such a false document. However, when I got in to see the officer at the Palac Mostowskich, he didn't pay any attention to my forged photo. Then I became convinced that my fears were unjustified; they didn't care what documents you submitted; the most important thing for them was that you were leaving the country.

Zina returned on that infamous day when the Soviet Army, together with Poland's and other Warsaw Pact military units, occupied Czechoslovakia. The task before us now was to visit the Soviet Embassy and apply for permission for Zina to emigrate to Israel. This was the scariest part. We tried to predict what would be their reaction to such an unheard of request. Zina wanted not only to go to a capitalist Zionist country, but also to one that was branded an aggressor and one with which the Soviet Union had severed diplomatic relations. We prepared ourselves for a harsh reaction and weren't sure that she would actually get permission. We decided on a low key approach in which Zina would agree with their political reprimand but would argue that it was her

husband and the father of her children that decided to emigrate and she had to follow him. I went with her to the Embassy to provide support, if needed.

Zina calmly said that she was applying for emigration to Israel, and the girl at the entry desk asked her for the Soviet document she was holding. We thought that this was just a preliminary procedure of registering. The girl took that document, got up, and went to the adjoining room. Within a few seconds, she returned, gave Zina back her document, and turned to the next visitor. We asked her what was next, and she said, "That's it. You have permission to go." We were completely shocked. This was probably the fastest response the Soviet (and any other) bureaucracy had ever made. Hallelujah! We were on our way to freedom.

Many years later, I read an account of the events of 1968 in Poland and found an opinion that all these events were orchestrated by the Soviets. I don't believe that theory. However, the behavior of the Soviet Embassy in Warsaw clearly indicated that, not only were they not surprised by Zina's desire to leave, they gave the impression that they were waiting for her. The entire procedure was worked out in advance and was made as easy as possible. That could only happen because they wanted us to emigrate. In this sense, they were a party to those events.

In a short while, we received the travel document from the Polish authorities in which it was stated that I was stateless because I had to agree to renounce my Polish citizenship as a condition for getting permission to emigrate to Israel. We were allowed to emigrate only to Israel because, in this way, the authorities could continue their policy of not allowing non-Jewish citizens to emigrate. This was also the way the authorities made sure to implement Gomulka's thesis that Jews should have only one Fatherland, either Poland or Israel. No other Polish citizen who emigrated to another country had to renounce his citizenship. But we were not sorry because of this, except that it was an inconvenience, and if we would be unable to get sponsorship abroad,

we would be defenseless. The authorities allowed us to exchange the equivalent of five dollars per head as our travel allowance.

We started preparations for departure. We decided not to take our furniture and to limit our luggage to the absolute necessities. This meant we had to sell everything we had or give it away. We couldn't part with many books we had accumulated over the years. Each book or printed material had to be listed and presented to the custom agency for approval. While we were working on that list, Wlodzimierz, our older son, glanced at it one day and saw that we were going to Israel. But he was not upset about it, and didn't express any signs of disapproval. Edward was told that we were going on a trip around the world, and he was excited about it. His disappointment came later. In general, we kept our plans confidential so that the children and ourselves would not be subjected to unnecessary comments from mischievous people. We also had to present to the customs agency all our family photos (prints and negatives). A few photos were disallowed; one was a picture of the Hungarian Parliament in front of which was a military band displayed in a ceremony of greeting a foreign ambassador and nearby a marching line of kindergarten children. The photo was qualified as a picture of a military object. No wonder, some 12 years earlier, Soviet tanks were raging a battle with Hungarian freedom fighters in that place.

The custom officers were very nasty and corrupt. People were giving them money or valuables to be allowed to take out their possessions. And even that didn't guarantee that the next custom control (on the train) wouldn't question some items and require a new bribe. I think that we didn't have much trouble with them because we didn't take many things out. For all our savings and the money we realized from the sale of our furniture and belongings, we bought a set of silverware that we could officially take out. We still have this set of silverware and intend to pass it on, from generation to generation, as a family memento.

Vienna and Rome: Refugee again

Our train departed from the Warsaw-Gdansk station, which consisted of a small barrack near the platform. For some time, this became the place where heart-breaking scenes of departing parents or children took place. Each day, many of the dwindling Jewish community assembled here to say goodbye to their relatives and friends and invariably the departing people intoned the Israeli anthem when the train to Vienna left the station.

We had been there a few times to see our friends off. But, on October 28, 1968, it was our turn to wave from inside the train to the many well-wishing on the platform. This was not an ordinary farewell, where people expect to meet again. We were parting from a country that was our home, where the ashes of our parents and relatives were spread, for which we were fighting and which we helped to build. It was not easy to leave our birthplace, even if we felt that a great injustice had been done to us and before us to our parents and relatives. We were leaving without knowing where this wandering would lead us. We left many friends with whom we had shared our lives for many years and upon whom we had depended in difficult times. On whom would we rely now? There were tears in their and our eyes.

The final whistle was given, and our journey to the unknown started. We were still not entirely free. A final custom control on the Polish-Czechoslovak border was still awaiting us. And then, a final stretch through Czechoslovakia. Our gloomy feelings caused by the farewell were

mixed with fear of the immediate day and with hope and expectation of a better future in the free world. After a two-hour stay, we finally crossed the Czechoslovak border. By evening, we were approaching the Austrian border became really excited. Here comes our freedom! We decided to open a bottle of champagne when the train reached the bridge on the Danube. Similar celebrations were taking place in other cars of the train. We felt literally like we had thrown off the yoke of many years of persecution and deprivation of basic human rights. Now we were free even, though we didn't know how we would manage our life the next day. But for now, we were happy and that's what counted.

In the early morning hours of the next day, we arrived in Vienna. Before we even left the train, Austrian police came in and asked us to surrender our travel documents. Then we unloaded our belongings and stepped out onto the platform. Jewish activists, mainly Zionists from the *Sochnut* (an Israeli organization) welcomed us and took care of our immediate needs. There were also representatives from HIAS (Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society). We were driven to a small hotel in downtown Vienna. HIAS also provided us with some cash, with which we started our refugee life. For the first time, I felt how helpless we were, having to depend on a relief organization and behaving almost like beggars. In a large room, hundreds of refugees like ourselves were trying to get to those who registered us and distributed a small amount of cash to allow a meager survival. It was not so much the meagerness that depressed me as much as the situation that I suddenly realized I was in. We gained freedom in exchange for misery.

It happened many times to me that, after I was able to get out from under bad conditions and lift my life up, a new disaster would befall me. When I extracted myself from Siberia the first time and thought that, in Ivanovo, I would improve my situation, the Soviet-German war started. After successfully joining the Red Army, where I had a chance to participate in the struggle

against the Nazis, I was unexpectedly sent to a coal mine in Siberia. After advancing in my professional work to the level of entering the doctoral program at Warsaw University, the student demonstrations started, which turned into the virulent anti-Jewish actions of the Party. I joined the Party, in the hope that the oppressed Jew could find shelter there. Instead, I had to leave the country to find my family and myself in the miserable situation of refugees without any means to live.

After a few days in Vienna, we went to the Israeli Sochnut to retrieve the travel documents that were taken from us by the police. We were supposed to go to Israel, as the destination in those documents indicated. I had prepared a story explaining why I didn't want to go to Israel. In the first place, my wife was not Jewish, and she wouldn't feel comfortable in Israel. I can see now how offensive this argument may have sounded to an Israeli. The Sochnut officer argued that there were many such families in Israel and they were very happy. My response was, even though that might be so, it was a matter of attitude and that I couldn't persuade my wife to think otherwise at that time. He said, "Come in with her; we will talk to her, and I am sure we can dispel any doubt she might have." Then I advanced my other argument. I said, "I don't feel comfortable in a country with a hot climate." He replied, "But we have places where it is not so hot, for example Jerusalem has a very mild climate." We argued back and forth, variations of the same arguments, and finally he gave in. "Here are your documents, but if you change your mind, Israel will be glad to receive you." I have to say that, deep in my heart, I agreed with him, and it was an unpleasant conversation. I liked Israel and was happy and proud of its achievements, but I saw my place as being somewhere else.

After a fortnight in Vienna, we were transported to Rome where the HIAS had set up its main operation. Here the organization was much better and the treatment of the refugees gentler.

The *pensione* where we were placed provided us with food and shelter, but the manager let us know that he was doing us a favor. HIAS found this place, which didn't cost much, and the manager behaved accordingly. Most people left this place after a few weeks. The room we rented on Principe Eugenio turned out to be even worse. We were allowed one short shower per week and could cook only 30 minutes daily. After one week of staying in this place, the owner told us that we would have to leave by the end of the month.

Hence, I started to look for another place to rent. Every day, from morning until evening, I walked the streets of Rome looking at the fronts of houses, searching for one announcing the availability of a rental unit. The trouble was that, in most cases, I didn't understand what they were telling me. Moreover, most of these places had an annual lease; but we couldn't sign a contract for such a long time, since we hoped that, after a few months, we would be getting an immigration visa to our chosen country. I walked the streets of Rome for almost three weeks without results. The situation became desperate. When I came home after a full day of looking for a place, Zina was crying and the mood was terrible. I was also becoming increasingly discouraged. In the end, I had to agree to rent a room in another *pensione*. At least we were allowed to cook.

HIAS still took care of our immediate needs. The gentleman who dispensed aid was extremely pleasant. Although it was difficult to get to him because there were so many people, when one did get his attention, he was a delight. "How many people in your family? Four, here is 60,000 liras; what you need to move your things to a new place, here is another 10,000 liras; you need to buy some medicine; I will give you another 50,000. And have a good stay and take care of your family. Come and see me again in two weeks." Often, when one went back, he would remember the people and their special needs. No, he wasn't throwing away somebody's money. He acted within the limits and authority he was given and did it in a charming way so that you

would not feel like a beggar. That was not always the case. Quite the opposite. In most instances, it was a very unpleasant experience to go asking for assistance. We got an allowance the equivalent of \$100 per person per month. Within this limit, we had to pay for all our expenses: food, shelter, and other needs. We also got an additional allowance for transportation to school, which, in most cases, was used to supplement other expenses while we walked to school. With a place to live secured, we could concentrate on learning English. I had also arranged for a place to work on a paper for the European Association of Productivity Centers. In response to my letter to Mr. Hubert, Secretary General of the EAPC, and the recommendation from my Czech friends, he suggested that I write two papers on productivity problems for the Association, for which I would be paid several hundred dollars. I was very happy since, in addition to the much needed money, it also gave me an opportunity to regain my professional self-esteem and, at the same time, to become known among Western experts in my field. Mr. Hubert was also kind to arrange with the Italian Productivity Center for me to do my writing in their office. The director of the Center where I started working, warmly received me. I was extremely lucky because the Center was located literally 300 meters from the place where we lived.

Adam Jozefowicz, my friend with whom I worked at the CPC, was in Pakistan at the time we were in Rome. He was kind to send me a few hundred dollars and a promise from his sister in London that she would get in touch with us. She did and it was of great assistance. Her friends, Mr. and Mrs. Szczepaniak, lived in Rome and invited us to their house, showing great warmth and understanding about our situation. We started seeing them whenever they could find time. Mr. Szczepaniak was an economist and could give us good advice and many contacts in the U.S. One of those contacts was Professor Fritz Machlup, a world-renowned economist who was teaching at Princeton University. Professor Machlup knew Szczepaniak from Singapore, where he

set up the national accounts for that country. Szczepaniak also introduced me to Mr. Wyczalkowski, a Polish economist who worked at the World Bank in Washington, D.C., together with our good friend from the Bursa in Lodz, Heniek Francuz. We organized a meeting of economists, refugees with these two Polish economists, which was very helpful in orienting us in searching for a job when we arrived in the U.S.

HIAS was very good at preparing our documents for the U.S. authorities in Rome. The main problem they had was that many of us, including myself, at some time belonged to the Polish Workers Party, which, of course, was a Communist organization. U.S. law prohibited Communists from entering the country unless they could prove that they had joined the Party involuntarily or that they had left more than 10 years ago. HIAS was preparing papers, which evidenced that the applicant met one of these exceptions. In some cases, that was impossible to do. In such cases, they advised the individual to apply to emigrate to Canada, Australia, or Sweden—countries without such prohibitions.

The talk of the day at school was whether you already got an invitation for an interview to the American Consul. It took at least two months after the submission of the papers to be called for that interview. Another important hurdle was the medical examination. If one had tuberculosis, glaucoma, or a venereal disease, the chances were slim of being allowed to immigrate to the U.S. In my case, the X-ray found some calcification on the lungs, which looked suspicious. The spots on my lungs reflected a condition that I probably inherited from my parents, who had similar symptoms and for which the whole family was carefully monitored before the war. But I never had tuberculosis, and the Italian doctor diagnosed it as a benign condition not to worry about. However, we didn't know how the authorities that made the decision would interpret it. No wonder we were very concerned, since rejection could mean disaster for the entire family.

Mrs. Szczepaniak introduced us to her friends, a Jewish woman from Poland and her Italian son-in-law. At Christmastime, we were invited to their home. It was an affluent family, and they treated us like their own. Suffice it to say that, for the first time in our life, we were invited to a Christmas celebration, with a beautifully decorated tree under which gifts from Santa awaited each member of our family. We used to have decorated trees at New Year's instead of Christmas day, but never did we have gifts under the tree.

Mrs. Szczepaniak had another Christmas surprise for us. She organized a reception by a Roman bishop, especially for the Jewish refugees. The Bishop was very warm to us. He wished us all the best and showed a deep understanding of our plight. This was the first and only time we such a friendly, warm reception from a Catholic bishop. Rumors had it that the bishop was of Jewish origin. But it didn't make any difference. He greeted us in the name of his religion and in his official capacity.

Then came New Year's Eve. Traditionally, we always celebrated the coming of the New Year, and we intended to make no exception for this one. In Poland, we used to go to some large ball and dance the whole night. On occasion, we would assemble in a private place with many friends. This is what we could do with our meager resources in Rome. We assembled at the Temkin place with a few friends, the Zachariaszes and the Eisenbergs. Although this was a subdued celebration, we remembered it for its unusual circumstances. We were told to be very careful walking the streets that night because we may be killed. "By whom," we asked. "Aren't the Italians all in a good mood instead of killing somebody?" They said, "No, you don't understand. There is a custom here that people are throwing out through their windows all kinds of old furniture and appliances. You may be killed by such a flying object." We didn't believe it but, in any case, walked only in the middle of the street. When we returned home the next

morning, we saw that with our own eyes how true the warning was. The streets were littered with broken glass, furniture, dishwashers, and refrigerators. What a custom!

It reminded me of one New Year's ball at the Warsaw Polytechnic. The place was beautiful. There were thousands of people (not all students), and the music was too loud for our ears. At twelve o'clock, from the balconies of the round hall at the Polytechnic, bottles and glasses started flying down the floor where we were supposed to dance. We have never witnessed such misbehavior at a New Year's ball. After half an hour of such orgy, the organizers started apologizing for this ordeal. It turned out that a large group of German students were invited from East Germany, and they were the glass throwers. We left the ball immediately.

The children—ours and our friend's—loved Rome. They enjoyed walking down the streets, window shopping (sometimes they could buy an inexpensive toy), and produce markets, including the invitations by the sellers to buy the rich variety of fruits and vegetables. The oranges were always “la bellas” and one could buy a whole kilogram for “cento liras.” My function was to buy groceries. The store across the street had huge pieces of Parmesan and other cheeses displayed at the store entrance. Inside, the variety of cheeses and other delicacies was enormous; we weren't used to so many choices. The salesman met me with a smile, and, after observing me for a long time, during which time I was trying to figure out the names and prices, he finally asked me, “Do you speak English?” I said, “Yes,” happy that I would be able to do the shopping easily. Then he responded, “I don't.” I laughed, but was disappointed.

In the beginning of 1969, we were called for an interview at the U.S. Consul. It was a pleasant interview at which I stated all the reasons why I was in the Party and what I was doing there. He clearly liked my explanation that I was behaving like a dissident, a kind of revisionist that was always criticized by the leadership. I informed him that it was my own decision to turn in

my membership card; in other words, that I quit that gang for political reasons. Zina had an easier time with the Consul because she never was a Party member and left the youth organization Komsomol many years ago. Now we were awaiting a decision.

It came in the beginning of February and was positive. We were allowed to go to the United States! We started to prepare for the trip immediately. We were told that we would be assigned a chartered plane by the end of February. On the set date, we assembled at a plaza in downtown Rome. There were a few hundred people loading their luggage atop the bus that would take us to the airport. Many of our friends came to help us and say goodbye. This time it was not a sad farewell. People rather envied that we were already going, while they would have to wait in uncertainty. There was a lot of commotion and a little bit of chaos. But somehow we loaded the bus and started our journey to the land of opportunity. Needless to say, our spirits were high and we hoped for a better future. Friends wished us good luck. They shouted, "Earn a thousand dollars a month." It was a modest sum, but for us at the time, it sounded like a million. At the airport, we waited a few hours for the plane. Boarding the plane was even more chaotic than loading onto the bus. We were flying with a large group of Yugoslavian peasants. They knew nothing about civilized behavior and were pushing themselves as if their lives depended on it. We couldn't win with them and decided to wait until things settled down. So we boarded the plane last, a little nervous about whether we would get a seat. When we entered the plane, all the coach-class seats were already occupied. The crew decided to give us first-class seats. Hurray, we were going to the United States in style!

New York and Princeton: Vistas of opportunity

We arrived in New York late in the afternoon of February 14, 1969 at JFK airport. Our cousin Fred Heller, his wife Dina, and their two children, Peter and David, met us. After getting our luggage, they drove us to the Coliseum Hotel on 71st Street in Manhattan. Thus began our new life in the United States. Our cousins were very gracious and helpful. We got some financial support from NYANA, a Jewish institution devoted to assisting refugees from Communist countries. Needless to say, our situation was precarious. We didn't know the customs of this country, how and where to look for employment, and definitely didn't like to depend on handouts from relief institutions. Hence, we immediately started to look for jobs with the help of our cousin, Fred.

We learned very soon that the search for a professional job involves many meetings and interviews during which the list of hopeful prospects grows exponentially. Some of those meetings end with a lunch, which is very nice but it usually means no job offer. Letters sent out to a prospective employer end up with nice responses, such as "currently, there is no opening, but we're impressed with your qualifications and will keep your resume in our active files." The best meetings are those that are accompanied by a letter of recommendation from someone the interviewee knows well and, therefore, is trying to be helpful.

The meeting with Dr. Greenberg of the U.S. Labor Department was very productive. As I mentioned earlier, I met Dr. Greenberg at a United Nations meeting of productivity experts in

Geneva in 1961. He remembered me from that gathering and provided me with a list of people in New York. The Ladies Garment Union was on that list. I went there for an interview at which I was questioned about my knowledge of price indices. That was easy, and I got a job offer for a weekly salary of \$165. I considered it too low, and didn't accept it.

Simultaneously, I approached the Organization of Refugees in Profession. There I had several interviews, each time with a caseworker or his supervisor. I finally got desperate because time was passing, and my prospects looked bleak. I argued that I had experience in various industries, including coal mining, textiles, and construction. One call to an international company named Hanscomb Quantity Surveyors led to a meeting with its manager and, after a few conversations, I was offered a job as an economist, which paid \$200 a week. Of course, I accepted and was happy.

A few weeks earlier, I had met Professor Fritz Machlup of Princeton University. As usual, he promised to write several letters to various universities recommending me for a possible teaching position. Just before I was ready to leave, Professor Machlup said, "Goodbye, Dr. Broner." He was very gracious, since on my resume, I mentioned that I was just about to start my doctoral studies at Warsaw University. I immediately told him that I didn't have a Ph.D., but that I was offered the opportunity to start graduate studies at the University of Kentucky. To this, Dr. Machlup said, "Why not at Princeton University?" My intuition told me to say yes to Dr. Machlup—that I would be glad to accept, if offered. I didn't realize what it really meant to do graduate work at Princeton without having done undergraduate studies at a Western university. Put differently, my Marxist studies in Moscow were not helpful at all. As a matter of fact, Dr. Machlup repeated to me many times later that the first thing I had to do was forget everything I learned there. Dr. Machlup promised to talk to the Director of the Graduate School at the

Economics Department, Dr. William Baumol, and he was sure that he would agree with his idea and that I should get application forms in a few days.

Well, to make my story short, I was admitted to the Graduate School at Princeton University. Our next worry was to find a place to live. During these few weeks, we had stayed at the Coliseum Hotel. Professor Baumol invited us to come to Princeton to get acquainted personally. It was springtime, and Princeton was in full bloom. The minute we left the bus and looked around, we fell in love with this small, serene, and beautiful university town. Professor Baumol met us at a public school building, where he was sculpting figures in wood. I expected to meet a professor in an ornate office. Instead, he appeared with a piece of wood and a chisel in his hand, which he used all the time during our conversation. He was apologetic, saying that he did not realize that we were looking for a permanent place to live and would inquire whether some accommodation could be arranged at the graduate school housing. We returned to New York very happy.

At about the same time, I returned to the Hanscomb Company to tell the manager that I had been admitted to Princeton University and would not be able to accept the job he offered me awhile ago. He could not believe what he heard. He was very happy for me. He said that Princeton was a very prestigious university, and that it is extremely difficult to get accepted there. So he advised me to accept the offer, which I already had done.

On one hand, I was happy for such a wonderful opportunity, but on the other, it was too bad that I had to forgo the job offer at the Hanscomb Company. I was just about to leave when the manager asked me when I had to start at the school. I told him that the school year started in September. "Then why don't you work until then in our office?" My good luck had struck again.

We were just about to move into a little bigger room at the Coliseum Hotel when I got a call from Professor Baumol that the University had an apartment for us, available immediately. Our entire family went there for the weekend to paint the apartment with the idea of moving on Monday, the day I promised to start working at the Hanscomb office. On Monday morning, I went there and asked for a vacation day even before I started working. The next day, I started my new career as a quantity surveyor and economist at the Hanscomb Company. For more than four months, I commuted from Princeton to New York, walking from the Port Authority terminal to #60 on the 42nd Street. Although it was very hot in the summer, I enjoyed those walks in proximity to the famous skyscrapers, watching the beautiful young girls, both black and white, and the rushing, dynamic New Yorkers.

In the fall of 1969, I started graduate studies at Princeton University. I didn't realize how difficult it would be. My handicaps were insufficient undergraduate preparation in free market economics, almost complete lack of exposure to the mathematical culture in American economic literature and, of course, age. I was forty-four when I began studying at Princeton University.

Despite all this, I passed the general exams in two years as most students do and got my master's degree. Then I continued toward the Ph.D. level. In 1975, I finalized my doctoral dissertation on Economic Integration in Eastern Europe and was awarded the doctoral degree. I always stress that I was probably the oldest graduate student at Princeton University. It was a period of four years of extremely hard work, which resulted in opening many doors for me in institutions of higher learning. Ultimately, in 1974, I decided to accept an offer to join the New Jersey Office of Economic Policy. Within a few years, at the recommendation of the Economic Policy Council, I was nominated by Governor Brendan T. Byrne to the position of Director of that office and simultaneously became the Executive Secretary of the Economic Policy Council.

Both the Council and Office advised the Governor and the Legislature on the State's economic policy. Such institutions existed in only a few U.S. states, and we thought they played a useful role in governing.

In 1990, I retired from the State Government, moved to Florida, and started the next phase of my life, pursuing a new hobby of painting and writing this memoir. I am taking this opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to Professor William Baumol who was so kind to my family and me throughout those years at the University and as a member of the Economic Policy Council. Without the initiative and generosity of the late Professor Fritz Machlup, who was instrumental in launching my career in the New World, my scientific and professional advancement would have been impossible. Professor Peter Kenen guided me through the writing of the doctoral dissertation and helped immensely in its improvement. I am also thankful to all of my teachers at Princeton who helped the intellectual growth of the boy from Wesola Street. For many years, I worked under the leadership of Professor Joseph Seneca, Chairman of the Economic Policy Council. Joe Seneca and his wife Rosy remain my friends, and, I hope, critical readers of this memoir. All the time I was working on it, I remembered Rosy's advice to write with my heart, not only my fingers. Am I close to your expectation, Rosy? If I didn't bare my heart sufficiently until now, forgive me since I wanted to be closer to the facts than to the feelings. However, please read on. You should find it in the few pages of the Epilogue. Thank you all—my mentors and good friends.

Part three: Remembering

Pictures of lost life in Lodz

During the first half of February 1945, my army unit was withdrawn from the first offensive line for a short rest, and I was permitted to visit my birth-place, the city of Lodz. I hitched military vehicles going in my direction, thereby reaching Lodz within a few days. What I found in my home was terrible. The house on Wesola Street where we used to live was entirely empty. It was in the area of the Ghetto, whose last few hundred remaining residents were driven out by the occupants in the fall of 1944.

I entered the room that I left in 1939. No living soul! I knew that my parents had left this place in the beginning of 1940 before the Ghetto was closed and moved to Kamiensk. Nevertheless, I expected that any survivor from our family would certainly return to this place.

On the floor were laying many pieces of paper. I looked through some of them for clues what happened here. The only interesting information was a letter from Mr. Zylberszac, the neighbor with whom we escaped in 1939. He had left his wife and two daughters behind, intending to find a place in the Soviet-occupied territory of Bialystok and then return for them. Apparently, he managed to come back, but could not return to safety. The letter was addressed to the head of the Ghetto, Mr. Rumkowski, in which he was asking for a job as a guard.

The furniture in the room, or what was left of it, was ours. I was mainly interested in the wardrobe. On top of it, I had left a copybook containing historical postcards depicting portraits of all 40 Polish Kings and famous battles and their heroes, which school children were collecting for history classes. What a surprise! Nobody had removed my treasure from the exact spot where I had left it. Unfortunately, I didn't take it with me to the army unit, and I lost it forever.

When I left this place in 1939, I still had hopes that my people would one day return. The enormity of the Jewish tragedy could not be comprehended at that time. The information conveyed within the Polish Army was very limited. I'm not sure that, while participating in the operation across the Vistula River in the fall of 1944 to help the Warsaw uprising, I knew what had happened to the Warsaw Ghetto uprising more than a year earlier.

I had another opportunity to visit Wesola Street in the beginning of May 1945. To my astonishing surprise, I couldn't find any houses left on the entire street. What had happened? How did the buildings disappear? Soon I learned that, after my first visit, rumors were spread that one could find treasures in the abandoned Ghetto houses. Poles decided to disassemble all those buildings in search of the loot. In May, the place was completely destroyed. What the Germans didn't do the Poles themselves did. It was a shameful act of greed and disregard of the memory of their Jewish neighbors.

After being discharged from the Army, I returned to Lodz again. The place looked strange. All the familiar faces were gone. It was May 1946. Sufficient time had passed for the city to recover from the war and for the survivors return. Nobody from my family was among the few thousand Jewish survivors. My hopes that maybe a miracle would happen and I would see them again were still alive in me. However, it became abundantly clear that almost all the Jewish communities of Eastern and Central Europe had been annihilated. The life, tradition, culture, and

vitality of millions of Jews who had lived in that part of the world were eradicated forever. It was not a temporary loss that could be restored over time. Never will this Jewish life reappear in this part of the world or, for that matter, anywhere else. I am fortunate to have been among the last eyewitnesses that had first-hand knowledge about that lost life, which I recall here with a great deal of nostalgia.

In the span of seven years (1932-1939), I attended two integrated religious-secular schools. The first was the Talmud Tora on Aleksandrowska 32 and thereafter the famous Rabbi Meisel School on Jakuba Street. Since I already mastered the basics of the prayers and some Tora text, I could continue with a systematic learning of the entire text of the five books of Moses, then Rashi (the commentaries to those books), and finally Mishna and Talmud. The latter, essentially a large number of volumes on subjects of Jewish law and behavior, I could only scratch the surface of. The method of teaching these subjects consisted of a lecture outline by the teacher and subsequent repetition by pupils. The more often one repeated, the better. In this way, for example, I learned by heart all 150 Psalms of David.

The secular part of the instruction followed the requirements of the Ministry of Education. Of course, we started out in first grade with the famous *Elementarz* by M.Falski. Who can forget the first lesson: *Ala ma kota i Ola ma kota* (Ala has a cat and Ola has a cat).

I had good teachers. Mr. Magalif, the director of the secular part of the school, taught mathematics; Mr. Lange, the Polish language; and Mr. Hecht, geography. I fondly recall the geography lesson about the Middle East in which Mr. Hecht interspersed a few Hebrew songs. He was afraid of doing it; nevertheless, his Zionist feelings prevailed. The two songs I learned then were: *The Hatikva* (future Israeli Anthem) and *Techzaknu*. These are the songs that I can recall the words and melodies of to this day.

At the Jakuba Talmud Tora, Madame Ginsburg cared about our lunches. We would line up at the appropriate time, pay 5 groszy (a nominal price), and be let in for a good meal, usually thick soup, a small meatball, and bread. Madame Ginsburg approached charities and wealthy Jews for donations, which allowed her to keep the price of a meal very low. If some pupils didn't have the 5 groszy, she would still let him in, asking them to bring the money next time.

Wealthy Jews, in addition to altruistic donations, supported the school by requesting special prayers for deceased benefactors or their relatives. On those occasions, students from several classes would assemble in the director's office (the Menahels room) where an altar would be placed and the little cantor in my class would conduct the prayer. His voice was phenomenal. The prayer was very dramatic. It started with the words, "God, full of mercy, receive the soul of..." ("El molay rachamim"...). This traditional burial prayer was rendered so beautifully that it still rings in my ears. I have forgotten many prayers and psalms that I knew by heart, but not this one, only because of that little boy's singing. I'm sure that his voice awakened in me the appreciation of vocal music that lasts until today.

Several colleagues from my class sang in the Wolborska Synagogue choir. It was a mixed choir of young boys and adult men (Professos Zaks was the director). They performed so beautifully that I liked to go there, frequently alone, while father went to his usual prayer house. Paradoxically, when I attended services in the same synagogue in late 1930s, the cantor was not as good and contrasted markedly with my memory of that mixed choir.

There was a fairly developed network of Jewish high schools in Lodz. Some of them were Hebrew-oriented; others followed the Yiddish tradition, and a few were politically independent. One of the private high schools was the Magalif High School for girls on the corner between Narutowicza and Sienkiewicza streets.

One beautiful late spring day in 1939, Mr. Magalif invited a group of selected pupils from Jakuba Talmud Tora to visit his wife's high school on Narutowicza Street. We were supposed to dress well and be prepared to play the role of gentlemen toward the "ladies from the Magalif School." It was announced as a tea party. We, the boys, did our best to present ourselves at the tea party, arranged by the girls. Initially, we didn't understand what all of this meant. After the party and a little conversation between the members of the two schools, Mrs. Magalif suggested that we pick up some tools and prepare the garden for planting new flowers. We didn't mind doing a little work. The girls were nice, and it was a first experience for all of us in our life. Good work, Director Magalif!. After more than sixty years, I can still remember that event and can envision the scene of that beautiful party. Incidentally, the Magalif High School must have been relatively small and exclusive since it was not mentioned among the Jewish high schools in Lodz.

In the mid-1930s, father used to take me with him for Sabbath and holiday prayers. Most of the time, we went to a small prayer room on Stodolniana Street near our home. While the prayers in this "sztibl" didn't leave any lasting impression on me, visiting the Rabbi from Tomaszover did; and from time to time, father would take me to visit him.

My paternal grandfather was called *Szymon the Tomaszover*, which means Simon from Tomaszov. However, he was not born in Tomaszov as that nickname might suggest. Whatever the reasons, my grandfather was very close to the Tomaszover Rabbi. Maybe they studied together or met to discuss difficult Talmud issues since grandfather was well educated in this field. Be that as it may, Grandfather Simon was regarded as a close disciple and follower of the rabbi. I don't recall my grandfather attending prayers at Poludniowa 28 where the rabbi lived and had his prayer hall. On several visits to my grandfather, I remember him being in bed most of the time. He probably died somewhere around 1935, at the age of eighty.

His fame in the rabbi's circle lasted and it was partially transferred onto my father and myself. That's why we would go, from time to time, to the rabbi's prayer house. Incidentally, my Uncle David, although shaven and in tune with more modern Jews, was also a welcome participant at the Tomaszover Rabbi's place. He was often asked to lead the prayers on a regular Saturday because he had a very nice, strong voice.

After Saturday prayers, the rabbi would invite my father and me to his private room, where he would inquire how father was doing and examine my knowledge of the Torah. I think he was pleased with what he heard from me, at least that was my impression at the time.

The visits to the Tomaszover Rabbi turned out to be of lasting value since they impressed me so immensely through my whole life. I have been thinking about him with reverence. The reason for this is the authenticity of the atmosphere there and the sincerity of the prayers. I will never forget the Yom Kippur prayers there. They are always memorable to Jews because of their dramatic content. On that day, Jews are judged for their deeds and sentenced to live or die, while they atone for their sins and transgressions against the many laws and rules the Torah asks them to obey and ask for forgiveness. The prayers led by the rabbi were extraordinary. One was under the impression that he communicated directly with God. He was honestly crying, begging for forgiveness. He had a very deep, velvety voice and used it absolutely convincingly in his dramatic appeal to God for the welfare of his flock. I think every one who participated in those prayers felt the same way. He raised us to his level of communicating with the Almighty. He brought us closer to God. In the middle of a prayer, he would suddenly stop. It would be very quiet at that moment. The feeling was that, maybe now, the heavens opened and listened to his and therefore our prayers.

The Tomaszover Rabbi had several sons that were at that time already well-known rabbis

in their own right. One of his sons was a rabbi in Kalisz. I don't remember where the other son was, but I do recall a moment when they had a reunion with their father. Among the worshipers, they were legendary because of their wisdom and intellectual capacity. When I saw them, I had the impression that I was seeing angels, heavenly people, not the ordinary ones I used to see in this prayer house. His youngest son was sensational. He didn't have a beard yet. But his long, corkscrew curls and his beautiful but pale face created the impression of an extraordinary person beyond this world.

These memorable feelings that the visits to the rabbi stirred in me were magnified by the gatherings on Sabbath afternoons, when the rabbi's followers would sit around a huge table and have supper together with their rabbi-teacher. He would pass around some food and specifically mention the name for whom the food was destined, say a few words about this person, and depart from this into some phrase from the Torah or Talmud that he would interpret, comment upon, and derive the proper teaching from. Interspersed within the *Chassidic* (Rabbi's followers) supper were prayers and songs intoned by the rabbi and picked up by the entire gathering. Rabbis were famous for composing a lot of these melodies, which were rather vivacious and joyful. This is part of the Sabbath tradition—to make one feel good, relaxed and happy. These suppers would end with the blessing of the division between the Sabbath and the weekdays. The separation between the Sabbath and the working days is a whole celebration unto itself. It starts with a benediction and the lighting of a colored plaited candlestick, which is the first work allowed after complete Sabbath rest. The benediction is performed with a glass of wine, which is then used to extinguish the candle. Thereafter, the electric light is turned on. According to tradition, putting some wine from the benediction into one's pockets should bring a prosperous week.

This religious experience from my childhood remains in my consciousness and is an

important pillar of my life. I am glad that the Nazis were not able to eradicate it altogether. Another lasting foundation was the liturgical music, which I received from the Wolborska Synagogue choir and the famous cantor from the Tlomackie Synagogue in Warsaw, M. Kousevitsky. In the fall of 1938, Kousevitsky gave a concert at the Philharmonic in Lodz, which I was lucky enough to attend, thanks to my older brother Samuel. Kousevitsky's prayers were so much better than anything I had known in liturgical music at that time, that I was immensely moved. I couldn't imagine a human being having such a strong and beautiful voice, being able to phrase dramatic melodies with such ease and clarity, getting to, so easily releasing, and sustaining high Cs for so long. Above all, I recall the sweetness of his voice and the fantastic compositions that reached deep into the Jewish soul. For many years, I dreamed of hearing him again. Several years later, while in the Soviet Union, I suddenly heard on the radio that Kousevitsky was going to sing an operatic aria in the Tbilisi Opera in Georgia. I learned then that he had escaped from German-occupied Warsaw. Much later, I read that the Germans arrested him in 1939 but, thanks to the efforts of many Polish luminaries in the artistic world, they managed to bribe the appropriate authorities. As a result, he was released and subsequently escaped to the Soviet side.

The Jewish community and our family had several joyous holidays. Among those was the Passover holiday. I well remember my father dressed in a white *kittle* (toga), standing up during the traditional Passover Seder (elaborate holiday supper), raising matzos, holding them high, and pronouncing, "*hu lachmu anyiu...*" ("this bread of affliction that our forefathers ate when in Egyptian slavery"...). It was one of the most solemn moments of the Seder. And, of course, we asked the four questions to which father and accompanying readers of the Hagada gave a very long answer. But the wait was compensated by unusually good food, and everybody had to drink four glasses of wine (children got small glasses).

And who can forget the unusual preparations for this holiday. Everybody had to clean out the rooms from anything resembling leavened bread. Some breadcrumbs were deliberately placed about the room so that they could easily be detected and removed by my father while reading some special blessing.

For Passover, a separate set of dishes, utensils, and cookware was required. Poor families didn't have them. Hence, they took advantage of the special teams that came to each Jewish yard with a tin barrel of boiling water into which all those items were put. After that hot bath, they were pronounced "kosher for Passover"(meaning they could be used for Passover). But all of these preparations had an additional, less religious, and maybe more important advantage. It compelled every family to do a thorough housecleaning.

Also for that holiday, parents tried to buy new clothes or shoes for the children. The morning after the first evening Seder, children would appear in the yard or in the street showing off all their new things. We also ate matzo outside the house. Invariably, the Christian children asked for a piece of matzo. They loved it, despite the vicious propaganda spread by our enemies that Jews were killing Christian children in order to use their blood to bake matzos.

A few other Jewish holidays were enjoyable. One was Purim, during which Jews read the story of Esther and Mordechai, who saved the Jews in Persia from the plans of the Jew-hater Haman. On that day, Jews were allowed to have a few drinks of alcohol and get very merry. It was also the custom to send gifts to friends and relatives during that holiday. Messengers carried baskets of fruit, sweets, and wine to their destination all over the city upon delivery of which they got generous tips. Little kids got small *gregors* (devices used to drown Haman's name whenever he was mentioned in the reading of the story). Children put on masks and visited many neighbors,

singing a little song, and were rewarded with gifts and money. It resembled Halloween, but had a completely different content.

Once a year Jews erected temporary shelters for the Feast of Tabernacles. The shelter was made of wooden planks nailed on 2 x 2 stubs, and the top was covered with branches of pine trees. There were about 15 male members from the building that ate holiday meals in the shelter in our yard for eight days. Even though most families in our building were poor, the holiday meals were better than usual, maybe because they had to be exposed to the impression of all the neighbors. Since this *sukos* (holiday) came in the fall, it was frequently raining and the meals were consumed while drops of rain were falling on the heads and into the meals. The tradition didn't allow switching to the rooms, even under heavy downpours.

I very much liked Simchat Tora because of the ecstatic dancing of Jews with the Tora scrolls. It expressed the extreme joy of having finished reading the weekly chapters of the Tora and the start of a new cycle of reading. The dances were accompanied by singing of very joyous melodies by the entire congregation. Sometimes I had the impression that the dancers got so exalted and carried away that they would never end it. But they had to end their vivacious dances because the scrolls were needed for the next group, since nobody should be left out of participating in the dances. After each round, a new group of worshipers was called for a "kupa" picking up the Tora scrolls and joining a new round of merry dances. I anxiously awaited the moment my father would be called to join. I had never seen him dancing before.

Political life in Lodz was very active. There were two major political parties on the so-called Polish street: The Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and the National Democracy (ND) Party. On the Jewish street, there was a multitude of political parties. A whole spectrum of Zionist parties from the religious-orthodox ones to the far-left Socialist ones. "Bund" was similar to the PPS, a

Socialist Party of Jewish workers, which strongly opposed the Zionist ideology of returning to the ancient Jewish land in Palestine. According to the Bund, Jewish workers should join the Polish workers in a common struggle for workers rights in countries where they lived. There was also an illegal Communist Party. Each of these parties had their equivalent youth section.

Jewish youngsters were involved in political activities from an early age in life. In our room on Wesola Street, neighbors often got together on Saturdays or late in the evenings to talk politics. Invariably, they turned to comparisons of the strengths of the Russian or German armies, as well as the intentions of Western countries. I listened to those conversations with great interest, and began reading newspapers when I was ten years old.

My older sister Esther often took me to political meetings that she regularly attended at the Poale-Zion. There I got the taste of exciting speakers. I recall one evening when Comrade Levi (I think I remember her name correctly) came from Warsaw to address a huge crowd at the Poale Zion locale. She was young, no more than 30 years old. I think she was already a member of the Central Committee of the Poale Zion party. Her speech was sensational—fiery, erudite, extremely well structured, convincing, and encouraging.

Party locales were also places where young people met in the evenings to hold informal, heated debates. Youths would usually assemble in a circle and discuss various issues. The subjects were not confined to political programs of various organizations but covered actual political events on the world scene, which were interpreted in light of different ideological standpoints. What was most impressive in these debates was the broad knowledge and skills of those young partakers. Some of them were phenomenal. They could debate ancient history, philosophy, literature, and theatre, as well as current political situations with equal ease. My sister Esther was delighted to listen to those lively and learned exchanges, as was I.

In an election year, the political war between the PPS and the ND would intensify. To every proclamation of the ND, which was preaching virulent anti-Semitism, the PPS responded vigorously against their hate politics. I was always comparing the PPS posters, which had a black-on-red background, with those of the ND, which had a red-on-white (national colors of the ND) background. With great satisfaction, I observed that the PPS was so true to its Socialist teaching. Politically, it was not easy for the PPS, since a large percentage of the Polish population had not healed from the anti-Semitic bacillus. But it was also encouraging because, par excellence, the Poles had done it themselves.

The ND was not satisfied with propaganda alone; it frequently turned to violence. Often their militant members would beat up Jews sitting in parks on a Saturday afternoon. During the municipal elections of 1937 (or was it 1938?), groups of ND were using knives against Jews. I remember one day, Pani Sabina, our Polish landlord, had returned from a walk and was shocked at what she had just seen: "Jesu Maria," she screamed. "They're using such big knives against the Jews." She used her hands to show that the knives were as big as her forearm. The Socialists won that election!

In 1939, the central government disallowed the customary May Day demonstrations in the streets, but rallies could be held indoors. By that time, I was enamored with the Polish Socialist Party. I decided to participate in a May rally at the movie theater Zacheta on Zgierska Street, not far from our place. There, for the first time, I sang the *International*. I can still hear in my head the thousand voices of Polish workers, members of the PPS, singing that proletarian anthem. Many more times I had to sing this song, but never was it so inspiring as it was at that rally.

There were many Jewish theaters and actors' groups in Lodz. I was too young to frequent theaters very often. Nevertheless, I went a few times to the Dzigan and Szumacher comedy

shows. They entertained the Jewish community in Lodz for many years. I remember their sketch about the Einstein relativity theory, which Dzigan tried to explain to his uneducated friend . No explanation was good enough for him to understand. In response to each question, whether he understood it or not, he answered “no.” Finally, Dzigan gave up trying and pronounced that his friend had no brain, “only a stone,” which in Yiddish is translated as *ein stein*.

There was a whole gamut of cultural institutions in Lodz, including musical ensembles. Among the famous musicians was the world-renowned pianist, Arthur Rubinstein, who was already abroad when the war started. A sizeable group of professional artists contributed to theater scenography and art shows. Most of them perished in the Ghetto and death camps.

Israel ben Shimon Broner (1888-Holocaust)

My Father was a man of inherent honesty and integrity. He couldn't tell any untruth, even in the most inconsequential matter. He was a religious person with wide knowledge of modern Jewish literature and theater. In his professional work as a hatmaker, he exhibited a meticulous approach to every detail and artistic abilities.

Since 1933, when our family was living in Lodz, I was very close to him, attending prayers together and even helping in his work. This allowed me to observe his mild character, concerns about the entire family, and struggle to provide it with the means to lead a decent life.

How proud would he have been to know that his two surviving sons placed his name and those of the entire perished family for eternal memory at Ad Vashem in Jerusalem—Capital of the reborn State of Israel.

Ajdel Ita Broner (1892-Holocaust)

Mother's name, Ajdel, in the Yiddish language means "gentle." Her name fit her character extremely well. She was tall, had a slender figure, and regular facial features.

Mother wore a wig, as was the rule for religious Jewish wives.

I recall her as a contented person, despite the hardships that befell our family after the Great Depression. She hoped that more prosperous times would return to us.

Unfortunately, this didn't happened, and then the war started.

She had seven children; the last one, Yitzhak, was born in 1930. Mother never raised her voice to discipline the children. Somehow, all of us tried to help her.

She proudly played the role of mother, wife, housekeeper, and breadwinner. I saw her last time waving goodbye in November 1939.

Chana Moszkowicz-Broner (1913-Holocaust)

My oldest sister Chana was already married and had two young children when the war started. In my mind, she was very charming and the prettiest of all my sisters. My memory of her doesn't go far back, since she didn't stay with us in Kamiensk and was not often at home after we returned to Lodz in 1932.

The one event that I recall well was the preparation for her wedding, probably in 1935. There was a lot of baking in our room on Wesola Street. However, the wedding ceremony itself took place somewhere else, and I don't remember it.

Her husband, Leib Moszkowicz, was a handsome man whom I liked very much. One day he brought a quarter pound of thinly sliced pineapple to our place. It was a novelty fruit for us, and I still remember its delicious sweet, juicy taste. I couldn't find any trace of Chana's family after the war.

Esther (1916-Holocaust)

As far back as my memory reaches, Esther was always around. Whether in Kamiensk in the early 1930s or in Lodz up until my escape from the occupied city in 1939, I remember her being mother's foremost helper and the children's caretaker.

She was intellectually curious, a characteristic that influenced her children's intellectual development. It was directed toward socio-political knowledge as a supplement to our religious upbringing. Esther was the model to follow in our family. Learning, working, participating in political life, and being happy under any circumstance—all of these the qualities of one young lady: my sister Esther.

Dvojra (1922-Holocaust).

Dvojra was an enthusiastic and happy teenager. Up until 1939, she attended high school. She was a very good student. Realizing how expensive it was to send a child to school above the compulsory elementary seven grades, I surmised that Dvojra was reaching for the highest level of education in our family.

She was physically well developed, tall, and pretty. Light brown hair and eyes, as our mother's, distinct from the dark coloring of our father and sisters Esther and Shajndl. Dvojra wrote sketches for the school drama group and prepared shows. She exhibited talent for acting and could have reached far in that direction.

War and murder interrupted that beautiful young and very promising life, as it did for so many millions more.

Shajndl (1927-Holcaust)

Since Shajndl's age was close to mine, I spent relatively more time with her than with my other sisters, maybe with the exception of Esther. I don't recall her causing any trouble or misbehaving as a child. I have the impression that Shajndl was shy and somewhat introverted. She was quiet, going to school, playing, and, at the same time, feeling the constraints stemming from being a child in a poor family. We traveled together to our grandparents in Kamiensk when I was ten years old and Shajndl a few years younger. It gave us a chance to observe the life of our grandparents, and we didn't require special attention from them. Together, we spent the time as best as was possible in that little "shtetl."

In November 1939, Shajndl replaced me in the breadline, allowing me to join my older brother Samuel in our plan to escape from German occupation. I always considered this act as a gift from Shajndl to save my life.

Yitzhak (1930-Holocaust)

The image that my memory stored away of my youngest brother Yitzchak is seeing him sitting atop the front bed board answering arithmetical questions. At the age of seven, he already knew the multiplication table and wanted the older siblings to check out his knowledge.

We went to the same school on Jakuba Street in Lodz. In my mind, I still see us, walking together in the wintertime; Yitzhak dressed in a warm coat with a fur collar, a gift from our uncle Abram, the furrier.

During the first weeks of German occupation in 1939, we used to go very early in the morning, before the end of the police hour, to get in line for bread. Yitzhak was a smart and joyful boy. Knowing his vitality and character, I am sure that he was trying to help the family to get food during the occupation. But for how long?

Wesola Street

The art work by Yakov Tsatskin. Yakov is a professional artist. He immigrated to the US in 1994 with his mother and family. They reside in Sarasota. Yakov followed the design of Wesola Street that Adam Broner sketched from memory.

Purim

Passover

Simhat Torah

The Synagogue on Wolborska Street in Lodz

The Synagogue was destroyed by the Germans in November 1939. (Photo from Lodzka Ksiegarnia Niezalezna, Lodz 1999).

Pilgrimage to Kamiensk - the Shtetl

We were approaching the village of Kamiensk with great apprehension. About fifty five years had passed since I was last there. A Great War, a revolution, and many social and ethnic upheavals had since transpired; and Kamiensk certainly wasn't left unscathed. It wasn't easy to imagine how the village must look now. Will reality resemble the pictures stored away in my memory? Will I be disappointed? No, I didn't expect to find my people there, about that I was certain. But would I recognize the buildings where my grandparents and our family had lived so many years ago? Will the oversized Kosciuszko monument, associated with so many happy days of my childhood, still be there? These and many other questions were running through my mind while driving in that dilapidated Polish car, nicknamed the *maluch* (midget). Most frightening was the impending confrontation with the place and people that possibly witnessed the last days of my family's annihilation by murderers bent on eradicating the whole Jewish nation. I wasn't able to face that horrible truth for many years immediately after the war, when many more witnesses were still there. Now, in 1991, after being away from Poland for more than 23 years, I finally made the

pilgrimage to that graveyard.

Kamiensk holds a very important place in the long history of many generations of the Broners. While searching my roots, I have made many discoveries about my ancestors. I knew that Mother's parents lived there and could surmise that this place was associated with many more generations of their ancestors. What surprised me enormously was that Father's roots also led to Kamiensk. Many generations of Broners lived there. My paternal grandfather was also born in Kamiensk, and his parents moved to Lodz in the mid-nineteenth century. Only recently did I discover that Grandma Blima (my maternal grandmother) was also a Broner. I always knew that my parents were relatives before they married, but didn't know that it came from Grandma's side. There must have been many graveyards of Broners, if they were to have been preserved in Kamiensk.

My parents and most of my family did return to Kamiensk after the German occupation. In the winter of 1940, before the closing of the ghetto in Lodz, my parents decided to move the remaining family to Kamiensk. They probably reasoned that, in a small place surrounded by many villages frequently visited by my Grandfather, life would be somewhat easier, at least as far as getting food and avoiding the big German persecution machine. They arranged for a peasant card, grabbed as many belongings as they could, and departed for a journey that lasted several days in freezing temperatures. We know from their letters that Father was with them. He contracted some disease, in addition to frostbite, that required surgery. The operation was not performed well, and he had to return to the hospital in Radomsko, a little town not far from Kamiensk.

We also learned that my sister Esther was with them and that she was working in the large manor outside Kamiensk. I assume that my sister Shajndl and my brother Yitzhak were also with them. I'm not sure about our sister Dvojra, who was in Tomaszow Mazowiecki, staying with

some relatives. We don't know whether she later joined the rest of the family. Our oldest sister, Chana, who had her own family, presumably remained in Lodz.

We hoped that our visit in 1991 might shed some light on what had happened to all of them. As expected, the place looked much smaller now than it did in my memory. The plaza was small, and the Kosciuszko monument was no longer there. The church remained, across from which we saw a group of people doing some construction work. We approached them. It looked like they were building a monument again. We asked the workers what they were building. Jokingly, they answered, "Maybe it will be a monument to Lech Walesa, President of the new Poland. No, actually we're restoring the original monument of Kosciuszko." Then the chairman of the restoration committee and the mayor of Kamiensk approached us. We introduced ourselves and immediately asked whether any of them remembered the glazier that lived near the church. They were too young to remember people from the pre-war years, but suggested that we talk to Mr. Sowinski, who knew a lot about those events. We also learned that they had a historical society, which publishes material about the old Kamiensk. Among other documents, they had the picture of the old Kosciuszko monument.

We moved on to Mr. Sowinski's house. He wasn't there; it was harvest time and they were in the field picking potatoes. His daughter, a very charming young lady, promised to help us find people who might know something about the fate of our family. Above all, she confirmed that her father was familiar with events during the war. We couldn't wait to see him. Within a half an hour, she would have completed her domestic chores and would show us the way to the potato field. In the meantime, we returned to the market place to visit the house where my grandparents lived before the war. Luckily it was still there. Some nearby buildings were destroyed during the war. In 1939, at the beginning of the German invasion, the few policemen from Kamiensk decided

to put up resistance against the German bombers flying over the village. They turned their rifle fire against a reconnaissance airplane. Within a short interval, a few bombers flew over the resisting village and destroyed several buildings adjacent to my grandparents' house. Since their house remained intact and we didn't receive any information from our parents about any casualties, we surmised that our grandfather survived that attack (I have learned from my brother that our Grandma Blima died before the war, which I wasn't aware of at the time).

I took some pictures and went in the house where I thought my grandparents had lived. The place inside looked different; there was no living room. Instead, there was a small village store. I asked the lady there how long she had owned the store. She said that she acquired it sometime in the 1960s. She didn't know anything about how this place looked before. However, she was very reserved in her answers and wanted to know who we were, what we were looking for, and whether we had owned this place before the war. We assured her that we were not looking for any ownership restitution.

Later on, we moved to the other end of the marketplace where the inter-city bus used to stop and where a gasoline pump used to be located. The pump was gone now, but a group of elderly people were standing there, so we asked them what they knew about the place. They recalled that a gasoline pump had been there, and they recalled that Jews in Kamiensk didn't own properties, but mostly rented. That may be so, but why was everybody so interested in who owned what? We realized after a few more conversations that property restitution had become a very sensitive issue.

Our next visit was to the manor where, apparently, my sister Esther was working in 1941. Would anybody remain who had been there at the time? One worker, who was employed in the manor all those years, was still there, but he said he remembered nothing. An heir to the original

Polish owner, who now lived in England, owned the manor, which was a state farm in the intervening years. Apparently, he had no difficulty in regaining his property.

The most fruitful visit was the one in the potato field. Mr. Sowinski was very friendly to us, remembered many things, and was willing to share whatever information he had. He recalled knowing the glazier, but no particular events related to him. In general, he recalled that the Germans had transported the Jewish population of Kamiensk from the ramp in Gorzkowice out to Tremblinka. We also learned that other Jewish people from Kamiensk were coming to visit the place and that an association of Kamiensk countrymen existed.

I couldn't resist entering the house where my little school used to be on the second floor. I found the place, but it looked much smaller than I had remembered it. The whole school, consisting of about eight pupils, used to assemble around a low table (what we now call a coffee table) in the corridor on the second floor just beyond a set of ancient-looking stone stairs leading to the corridor. I couldn't believe that this was actually the same place, my first and most memorable school.

We tried to contact some other people but were not successful in learning anything valuable. We thought that perhaps some official statistical documents had been preserved. Unfortunately, we were told that the Polish underground destroyed all the documents of Kamiensk so that the German occupants wouldn't be able to investigate the whereabouts of the men from particular households.

We then moved to Gorzkowice. I easily found the place where my uncle and auntie Pytkowski had lived. We found a man that had lived there all along. He had known the Pytkowskis, but didn't know exactly what had happened to them. He corroborated the information that we had received from others that the Jews were transported out in cattle wagons

to an unknown destination from the railway ramp in Gorzkovice. We went to that place and tried to imagine the tragedy of our people, who were loaded by the German beasts and sent away to the gas chambers in Tremblinka. During that entire visit, the thought never left me that some of the people we contacted in Kamiensk and other places may have actually contributed directly to the annihilation of my family.

Epilogue

Many years have elapsed since the end of the war and the annihilation of six million Jews, including my loved ones. One would normally consider that so much time would bring healing—that having my own family, children, and grandchildren would mute the anger. Also, it would seem that the German government's recognition of that nation's guilt in murdering so many innocent people would incline one toward forgiveness. But the opposite happened to me. The more time that passes, the angrier I am becoming. And it is not just anger. The more time I have to think about what happened, the more I learn from eyewitness accounts about the horrors of that mad regime, the less I am able to comprehend how so-called human beings could become such beasts and systematically kill millions of innocent people. I also can't understand how the leaders of the free world could have been so indifferent when they learned what the Nazis were doing to the Jews. The governments of the free world, who engaged in the struggle against the Nazis, knew early on what the Germans were doing in the extermination and concentration camps. They knew of the human deprivation and starvation of the millions enclosed in the Ghettos without hope of survival. Emissaries from Poland reported to the British and U.S. governments on the tragic conditions in those Ghettos. Did those governments inform their people about the Nazi atrocities? And how did those nations react to that grim news?

I don't intend to second-guess the motives of the free nations and their governments. I only want to understand. Think of it. In peacetime, whenever a tragedy happens to a single person or family,

the media informs people and they react sympathetically, rushing in with assistance when needed. I understand that a war was going on and that the free world was bent on defeating the Nazis. And that goal dictated all actions. But aid to the Jews should not have interfered with that goal. The misfortunate people in the extermination camps were begging and hoping for the allies to bomb those camps, knowing full well that they might suffer casualties. But they preferred the collateral damage from the allied bombs over the German gas chambers and ovens that were being used to burn thousands of people daily.

I wonder how many bold, letter-screaming headlines appeared in the leading newspapers of the free world at that time about those daily atrocities. And I am also willing to speculate that, if such screaming news stories were the order of the day, a different response from their governments and their armed forces would have followed. Was the Jewish population in the free allied nations sufficiently alarmed by the plight of their brethren under German occupation? It is known that many efforts on behalf of the Jews were made by those in a position to help them. We are also learning about many noble non-Jews that risked their position to render assistance to the endangered Jewish people in various countries. However, the prevailing view remains that those efforts were not overwhelming.

My anger is more appropriately directed to those bystanders—eye-witnesses who could have done much more to help their neighbors in the occupied lands, especially in Poland. Again, there were hundreds, if not thousands, who risked their lives to help the Jews by hiding them, providing food and even weapons to fight the Nazis. Unfortunately, they were a miniscule minority. Most of the population in Poland were either indifferent or, in many cases, assisted the occupiers in the extermination of the Jews. I am not able to understand why. Now that more eyewitness accounts are being published on the atrocities perpetuated by the Poles themselves, I

am at a loss. What hate must have been planted and nourished in their minds to cause them to seize the opportunity to kill their Jewish neighbors with whom not long ago they were dealing peacefully? And after the war, I lived in that country, worked with them, helped them rebuild the war-ruined cities—what an irony. I may have been with some of them in the same party that pretended to have such noble goals as brotherhood, equality, and peace, which I instinctively believed in. At the end of 1968, many of them showed their true colors full of hate again. And it persists even today, although there are no Jews in Poland to blame for their own misfortunes.

While I was standing in front of the railway in the village of Gorzkowice from where my people were transported to Treblinka, I was trying mentally to express my feelings about the Nazis and their helpers in murdering millions of Jews. I was searching for words, but couldn't find the ones that would adequately reflect the incomprehensible, irreconcilable thoughts swirling in my mind. Yes, there had been pogroms, massacres, religious strives, and killings before but never in history had such colossal killing machinery been directed at a tiny, defenseless minority population. Not a nation with its own land to be conquered, not an occupier of anybody's territory. A people that did no harm to the German nation. To the contrary, they made disproportionately, positive economic and cultural contributions to Germany, Poland, Russia, and many other nations where they resided.

Absolute madness! But how could a small group of mad racists induce millions of their countrymen to participate in such massive, heinous crimes? Were they all mad? Incomprehensible! Brainwashed by mad propaganda? Probably! But could it be so effective in the span of a few years? Or maybe the hate was there long before, waiting to be triggered by the racist propaganda? Even if this explains what had poisoned the minds of millions in Poland and elsewhere, the decisive role of the organizer and developer of the murder machine belonged to the German

Nazis. And the responsibility is theirs. Were they punished enough for their crimes? Does sufficient punishment for such a massive crime exist?

Most of the murderers were not punished at all! All I know is that, as a survivor, I am the one punished because I lost my loved ones: my baby brother Yitzhak; my younger sister Szajndl; my older sisters Dwojra, Esther, and Chana; Chana's two babies and her husband; and my Mother Ajdel and Father Israel. And the pain of loss still hurts. Every day, I try to put myself in the place of my younger brother, Yitzhak, or my sisters and parents. I try to imagine how they suffered. Whenever I drink a glass of water, I immediately think of the suffocating people locked up in the cattle cars on their way to Treblinka; when I have a meal, I think of the starvation in the Ghettos and concentration camps. When I go out in cold weather, I think of the freezing people gathered for hours for the camp roll calls, wearing only those infamous striped clothes. And I wonder whether the consciences of the surviving murderers are tormented or whether they're still laughing, since most of them escaped unpunished?

There is nothing I can do now except mourn and appeal to people all over the world to remember the Nazi atrocities and never allow such horrors to happen again. My appeal can reach people only by my writing. That is the main reason I am putting my story on paper, hoping it will add a little brick to the edifice of historical testimonies about the most horrible crime of the 20th century.

